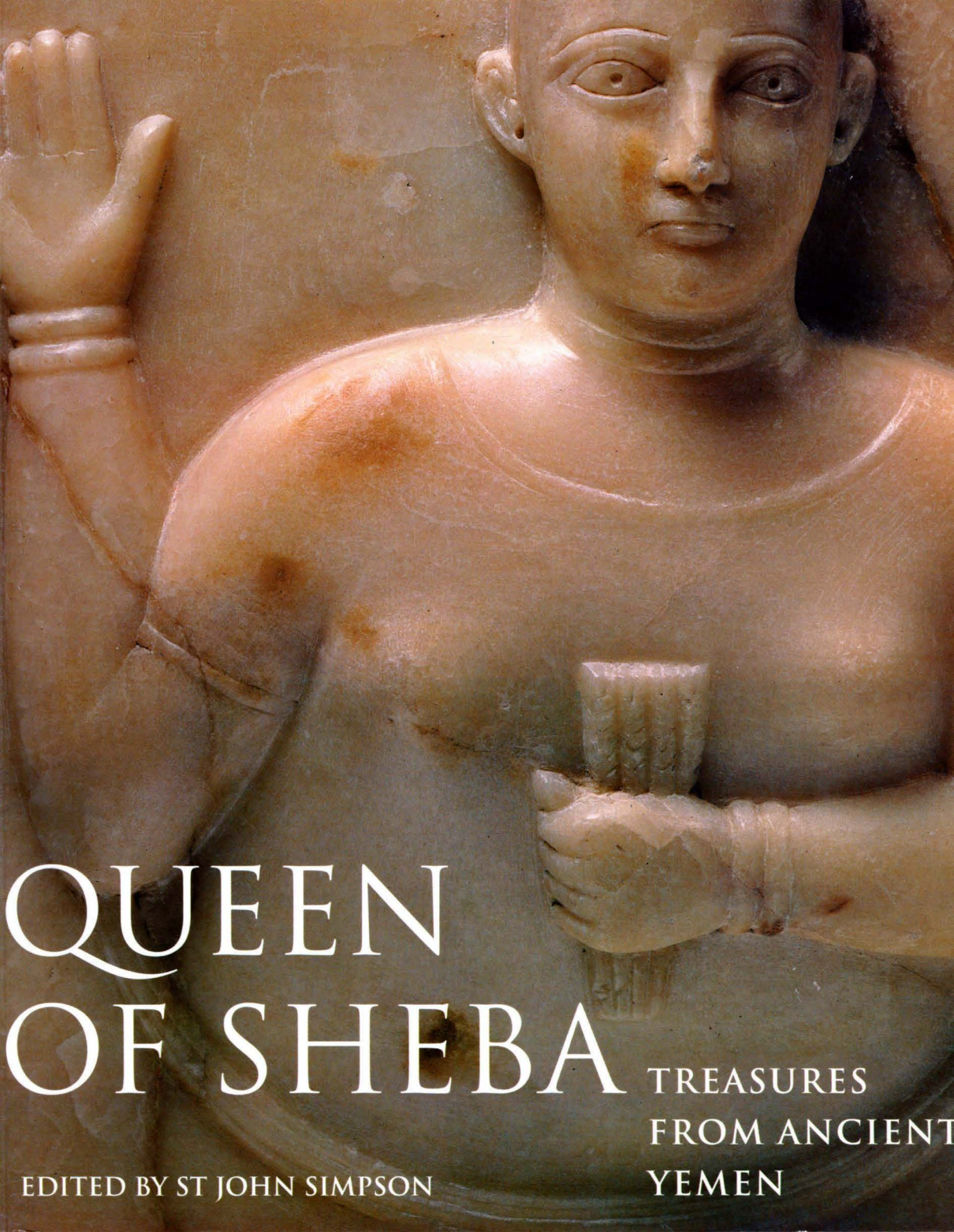




QUEEN OF SHEBA

TREASURES
FROM ANCIENT
YEMEN

EDITED BY ST JOHN SIMPSON

University of California, San Diego

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QUEEN



EDITED BY ST JOHN SIMPSON

OF SHEBA

TREASURES FROM ANCIENT YEMEN

THE BRITISH MUSEUM PRESS



Sponsored by **BARCLAYS**

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For their continued support and encouragement with this exhibition we are particularly grateful to friends and colleagues from Yemen, not least His Excellency Dr Mutahar al-Saeede and His Excellency Dr Hussein al-Amri, the present and former ambassadors of the Republic of Yemen; Dr Abdulla Abdulwali Nasher; Abdulaziz Abdulghani; Abdulaziz al-Qaithi; A. Wahab Thabet; Her Excellency Frances Guy, British ambassador to Yemen; Muhannad al-Saiani, GOAMM curator; Abdulaziz al-Gindary, Director of the National Museum of Şana'a; Mohammed Amin, GOAMM Chairman office director; Fadhl al-Maghafy, Yemen Embassy; Marco Livadiotti, events general co-ordinator; Universal touring company of Yemen; Yemen Airways; The British Embassy in Yemen; The British Council in Yemen; the Royal Netherlands embassy in Şana'a; and the British-Yemeni and Yemeni-British Societies.

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Any errors or omissions remain of course mine.

ST JOHN SIMPSON
Department of the Ancient Near East,
The British Museum

Sponsor's Foreword

The enigmatic Queen of Sheba has proved to be a constant source of inspiration to writers, composers and artists throughout the ages. We are therefore delighted to be supporting this imaginative exhibition at the British Museum as part of our *Invest and Inspire* programme.

Invest and Inspire is a two-year commitment to the arts. In addition to supporting *Queen of Sheba* at the British Museum, the sponsorship features a year-long season at the Royal National Theatre and two blockbuster exhibitions, *Titian* at the National Gallery and *Turner and Venice* at Tate Britain. It is an important development in our long-standing tradition of arts support in the UK and part of our community programme through which we donate one per cent of UK pre-tax profits every year.

We know that to inspire and make a real impact, an innovative and inclusive approach is needed. We are determined to increase accessibility and involve as many people as possible. This will be achieved through offering a variety of activities, the largest of which will be a series of Public Days, where free activities and outdoor performances will be staged for everyone to enjoy.

Barclays looks forward to working with the British Museum throughout the *Queen of Sheba* exhibition and we hope that you will all thoroughly enjoy it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Barrett', with a stylized flourish underneath.

MATTHEW BARRETT
Group Chief Executive, Barclays PLC

Foreword

I am delighted to write the Foreword to this catalogue published on the occasion of the opening of this *Queen of Sheba* exhibition at the British Museum in London.

At the outset I would like to express my utmost gratitude and warm congratulations to the officials of the British Museum, particularly those cooperating directly with the General Organization of Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts of the Yemen Ministry of Culture, for their excellent scientific and artistic efforts, and their endeavour to give the exhibition a sublime and harmonious appearance.

The Ministry of Culture in the Republic of Yemen has always been concerned to present to Europe a relevant and clear picture of ancient Yemeni civilisation which in the past it has been denied an opportunity to do outside Yemen. This travelling exhibition was first launched in Paris in 1997 and has since moved either in full or in part across Europe to other venues including Vienna, Munich, Rome, Turin and La Coruña. It has been met with tremendous acclaim judging by media reports and the high visitor numbers.

However, the transfer of the exhibition to the capital of the United Kingdom, with the great reputation that the British Museum adds as its host, has been a cherished hope and objective nurtured by us since the beginning of this European tour. I am therefore immensely pleased with this magnificent event which we hope will be another step forward in the ever-improving ties between Yemen and Great Britain. We are certain that contacts at cultural level are the best way of getting to know one another, as well as being a sound approach for attaining more fruitful co-operation and partnership in the cause of international development.

We in Yemen have learnt and continue to learn a great deal from our British friends, especially in the spheres of education, public administration and commerce, as well as in other useful scientific fields. Many of our young people received their education at British universities where they specialised in various areas. Following their return to Yemen they have become an important human resource which has added significantly to the contribution of their peers in the building of the foundation of modern Yemeni civilisation. Indeed we also have many expatriates working in the United Kingdom and some of them love the country so much that

they have settled here, speaking and writing poetry in English and finding spouses from among its citizens. They have not only shown distinction in the fields of business and academia but have had notable successes in other spheres such as the arts and sport.

We had from the outset chosen a name for the exhibition which depicts its content, namely 'Yemen: the Land of the Queen of Sheba', the reason being that the Queen of Sheba represents a potent ancient historical symbol for the Yemenis. For 3,000 years she has been the living and expressive embodiment of Yemen's cultural heritage, in a sense that the country's past still lives in its present. There are other Yemeni symbols linked forever to the Queen of Sheba which are still visible in our country, such as Mārib, the queen's capital, and al 'Arem, the Great Dam and engineering marvel which was an imposing feature of Sabaeen civilisation for over 1,500 years. There is also the historical figure of 'Bilqīs', the Sabaeen woman known as the Queen of Sheba. In Mārib the Queen of Sheba survives through folklore epitomised by several major archaeological sites, including the 'Throne of Bilqīs' (the Bar'ān temple) and the Maḥram Bilqīs (Awwām temple). Furthermore, the name Bilqīs has become popular for Yemeni women, as well as being widely used as a commercial merchandising brand and as a name for schools and cultural institutions.

Those who organised this exhibition did well to use this name as a title for both the exhibition and this associated catalogue, *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen*. It has also been noted that this catalogue provides a serious opportunity to tell the story of the Queen of Sheba and to convey her secrets in archaeology, art and legend. The organisers are to be commended for their effort to broaden horizons and set Yemen in a wider ancient historical context.

In conclusion, I share the view of those in charge of this exhibition and their inspiring optimism when they judge that it will receive a great deal of interest and large numbers of visitors. Its splendid displays of precious artefacts are bound to attract various sections of the population of this beautiful city as well as its many admirers and visitors from across the world.

HIS EXCELLENCY MR ABDULWAHAB AL-ROWHANI
Minister of Culture in the Republic of Yemen

(بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم)

يسرنى ان اكتب هذه الكلمة القصيرة لتكون فاتحة لهذا الكatalog والذي صدر بمناسبة اقامة معرض الازالة اليمنية في المتاحف البريطاني وفي قلب عاصمة المملكة المتحدة ، لندن وفي البداية أود ان اعبر للقائين على المتحف البريطاني وخاصة للذين اسهموا منهم بالتعاون مع الهيئة العامة للآثار والمتاحف والمخطوطات بوزارة الثقافة اليمنية - عن خالص الشكر وحيل التهاني على جهودهم العلمية والفنية الممتازة التي بذلت في سبيل اعداد المعرض واظهاره للزوار بهذا الشكل البديع والمنسق .

ولقد كان من ضمن اهتمام وزارة الثقافة بالجمهورية اليمنية ان تقدم الى العالم الأوروبي صورة واضحة ومفيدة عن الحضارة اليمنية القديمة والتي لم تتح لها من قبل فرصة الظهور خارج اليمن . فكان أن بدأ المشوار في باريس عام ١٩٩٧ تم تنقل هذه المعرض الى مدن أوربية أخرى مثل فيينا وميونخ وروما وغيرها ، ولاهى نجاحا منقطع النظير وذلك بشهادة وسائل الاعلام لكثرة توافد الزوار عليه ، على ان انتقال المعرض الى عاصمة المملكة المتحدة واستضافته في المتحف البريطاني ذي الشهرة الكبيرة كان من امالنا وهدفنا نصب اعيننا منذ بداية المشوار . ولهذا فان سعادتي غامرة بهذا الحدث السعيد الذي نطمح ان يكون لبنة أخرى في مد ماك العلاقات البريطانية اليمنية العريقة . ونحن على يقين ان التواصل الثقافي هو خير وسيلة للتعارف وطريق سليم نحو تحقيق مزيد من التعاون المشترك والاشراكة للتنمية بين الأمم .

لقد تعلمنا نحن اليمنيين الكثير من أصدقائنا البريطانيين ومازلنا ، وخاصة في مجال التربية والادارة والتجارة وغيرها من العلوم النافعة ، ودرس كثير من أبنائنا في الجامعات البريطانية وتخصصوا في شتى المجالات العلمية ، وعادوا ليشكلوا ثروه بشرية هامة اسهمت بعباءة وافر في بناء صرح النهضة اليمنية الحديثة ، بل أن لنا مهاجرين كثيرين

من عمل في هذه البلاد بجد واخلاص ، وبعضهم أحب هذه البلاد كثيرا واستقر بها وتكلم لغتها وتزوج فيها ، بل منهم من قال شعرا بلغتها . ولم يقتصر ذلك التفوق على ميادين العمل التعليم وانما تجاوز ذلك الى ميادين أخرى مثل الفن والرياضة .

لقد اخترنا للمعرض منذ البداية اسما يعبر عن محتواه هو (اليمن في بلاد ملكة سبا) ، ذلك لان ملكة سبا رمز تاريخي عريق لدى اليمنيين ، وهو منذ ثلاثة الاف سنة الرمز الحي المعبر عن التراث الحضاري اليمني والذي مازال ماضيه يحيا في حاضره . وهناك رموز تاريخية يمنية أخرى ترتبط دوما بملكة سبا مازالت متواتره حيه في بلادنا الى اليوم مثل (مارب) عاصمة مملكة سبا و (العرم) وهو السد الكبير والمعجزة الهندسية الذي واكب الحضارة السبئية أكثر من الف وخمسمائة عام دون انقطاع و (بلقيس) اسم الاميرة السبئية التي عرفت بملكة سبا . وفي مارب اليوم ينسب اليها في الموروث الشعبي عدد من المعالم الأثرية والتاريخية مثل عرش بلقيس (معبد بران) وعمر بلقيس (معبد اولام) بل ان الاسم اضحى شائعا بين أسماء النساء في اليمن ، ويحلو للناس كثيرا استخدام هذا الاسم كعلامات تجارية للسلع التجارية والمنشآت الترفيهية والفنية وغيرها .

ولقد احسن القائمون على هذا المعرض صنعا عندما اتخذوا الرمز نفسه عنوانا للمعرض وعنوانا لهذا الكatalog المرافق : ' ملكة سبا ، كنوز من اليمن القديم ' وكذلك عندما جعلوا من هذا الكatalog محاولة جادة لرواية قصة ملكة سبا وتلمس اسرارها في الآثار والفنون والقصص ، وهو جهد مشكور يتجاوز السياق التاريخي لليمن القديم وبلغ به اتقا ملحمة وفنية رحية .

وفي الختام فاني اشاطر الرأي القائمين على هذا المعرض وتفاؤلهم الحسن بان هذا المعرض سيلقي الاهتمام الكثير وسيحظى بزيارة جمع غفير من الزوار ، ففيه من التحف الثمينة والعرض الرائع ما يجذب شرائح شتى من سكان هذه المدينة الجميلة وعشاقها وزوارها ، وهم كثر ، والذين يفتنون اليها من شتى انحاء العالم

عبد الوهاب الروحاني .

وزير الثقافة الجمهورية اليمنية

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Introduction

Yemen, the Land of the Queen of Saba'

Yemen is more than just the Arab Republic at the southern end of the Arabian peninsula. It borders the largest countries within the Council of the Arab Gulf states, namely Saudi Arabia to the north and Oman to the east. On the other side of the Gulf of Aden lie Somalia and Djibouti, and across the Red Sea lie Eritrea and Ethiopia. The exotic Indian Ocean island of Soqatra marks the extreme southern border of Yemen and the Bāb al-Mandab straits connect the Red Sea and Arabian Seas. Yemen is thus genuinely situated at an important junction between Asia and Africa, commanding a strategic location along the trade routes connecting the Mediterranean sea and Indian Ocean. However Yemen is more than simply a location on a map of Asia as it was part of the so-called ancient 'cradle of civilisation' in south-west Asia. Indeed Yemen might have been part of the urban revolution usually attributed to the great civilisations of the Ancient Near East and beyond: Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Indus valley. Although it is true that the greatest ancient civilisations flourished on the vast flood plains of these regions, recent archaeological research shows that urban societies also developed elsewhere, including the valleys of Yemen. Irrigation agriculture was certainly an important factor in the rise of urban civilisation, but it was not limited to those great river valleys as smaller valleys with seasonal high flash floods were successfully harnessed to create a highly efficient local agriculture.

Despite the fact that Yemen has never been within the spotlight of archaeological investigation, the large number of ancient inscriptions collected and deciphered by European travellers and scholars since the nineteenth century provided the first independent clues to the antiquity of Yemen which was described by classical authors as Arabia Felix or Arabia Eudaemon. These writers also refer to the wealth and prosperity of the Sabaeans and other states of southern Arabia which managed to conduct successful trade not only overland across Arabia but also via the Indian Ocean and Red Sea from the first millennium BC onwards. Last but not least the Old Testament throws light on Yemen, the land

of the Queen of Sheba (Saba'), from which this mysterious monarch is said to have travelled to meet King Solomon in the tenth century BC, presenting him with spices, much gold and precious stone carried on a great train of camels.

Yemen has now opened its doors to foreign archaeological missions and, after centuries of seclusion, the country finds itself the subject of international attention. A large number of important archaeological discoveries have been made here over the past twenty-five years, including, to name but a few, Bronze Age settlements in the highlands near Dhamār and the Sabr culture at Lahj near Aden, the Bar'ān temple at Mārib, the Hellenistic and later bronzes from Jabal al-Lawdh and the mummies of Shibām al-Ghirās near Ṣana'a'. The archaeological material exhibited in this exhibition and illustrated in this catalogue is intended to throw light on some of these sensational discoveries. Most of the unique artefacts exhibited in this travelling exhibition are shown here in Britain for the first time although the travelling exhibition has previously toured Europe – including Paris, Vienna, Munich, Rome, Turin and La Coruña – with great success. The present venue is expected to be the zenith of this. The press reviews which we have received from each of the venues at the end of each exhibition reflect genuine public interest and enthusiasm for the subject, firmly placing Yemen on the map. Yemen is therefore no longer the least known country in the world. It is a beautiful land with a very rich cultural heritage, where you can see the past surviving into the present. The antiquity of Yemen is gradually revealing its secrets and the future seems very promising.

The General Organisation of Antiquities and Manuscripts of Yemen and the British Museum are proud to present this exhibition *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from ancient Yemen*.

PROFESSOR YUSUF M. ABDULLAH
Chairman of the General Organisation
of Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts, Yemen

The Queen of Sheba in Western Popular Culture 1850–2000

LLOYD LLEWELLYN-JONES

The Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame through the name of Yahweh and she came to test him with hard riddles. She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue and with camels bearing spices, a great quantity of gold, and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she asked him all that was on her mind. Solomon had answers for all her questions; there was nothing that he did not know nor anything to which he could not give an answer. When the Queen of Sheba observed all of Solomon's wisdom and the palace that he had built and the fare of his table, the seating of his retainers, the service and attire of his attendants, his wine service, and the burnt offerings that he offered at the House of Yahweh, it broke her spirit. She said to the king, 'The report that I heard in my own land about you and your wisdom was true. But I did not believe the reports until I came and saw with my own eyes that what had been told me was not even the half of it. Your wisdom and wealth surpass the reports that I heard. How fortunate are your people and servants, those who stand always before you and listen to your wisdom. Blessed be Yahweh your God who delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel. It is because of Yahweh's eternal love for Israel that he made you king to administer justice and rule with righteousness.' She then presented the king with 120 bars of gold and an enormous quantity of spices and precious stones. Never again did so vast a quantity of spices arrive as that which the Queen of Sheba gave Solomon. King Solomon [reciprocated] satisfying all the Queen of Sheba's desires in addition to what he gave her in his official capacity as king. Then she and her retainers left and returned to her land. (1 Kings 10:1–13)

This short passage, repeated almost verbatim in 2 Chronicles 9:1–12, with its fleeting mention of a Queen of Sheba has had a considerable impact on world culture: Yemenis and Ethiopians both claim that this queen once ruled in their country, and Jews, Muslims and Christians have adopted the figure of the queen into their theological debates and religious traditions, and into their artistic and literary cultures.¹

Compared with other biblical women, or more generally to female rulers of antiquity, the Queen of Sheba has received an enormous amount of interest in later periods, which is quite at odds with her brief mention in the Scriptures. Thus while the Jewish heroine Esther has an entire Old Testament book named after her and is credited with saving her race from annihilation, she never gained the status of the Queen of Sheba in popular imagination. In Western tradition perhaps only two female figures have similar appeal: Delilah, the 'legendary' *femme fatale* from the Book of Judges (whose story is similarly told in a matter of verses and not chapters), and Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt, with a history and legend so rich that they have filled many volumes.²

Yet despite her popularity, the Queen of Sheba remains elusive. In attempting to imagine the queen and to plot her story, Western writers, composers and artists have labelled her both Ethiopian and Arabian, and have named her as (among others) Balkis, Bilqis, Magda, Makeda, Ni-caul, Nikaulis and simply as Sheba.³ The aim of this essay is to evaluate a few of the queen's many appearances in the popular arts of the West from 1850 to the present day.⁴ In this period 'Sheba' is found in several diverse incarnations: she sings opera, she performs burlesque, she sits for painters and photographers, she dances and she goes to Hollywood. Yet it is interesting to note how within this period popular conceptions of the queen often followed early Christian impressions of her as a wise

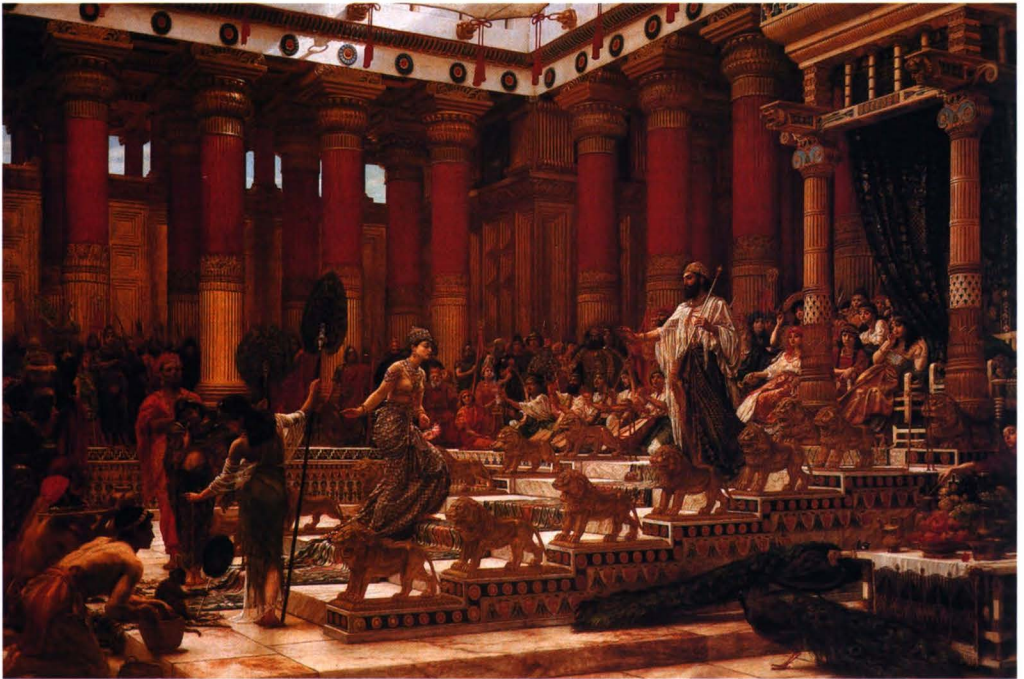


FIG. 1 *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, 1890; oil painting by Sir Edward John Poynter. (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney)

and wealthy ruler of a mysterious land, but coloured them with ideas drawn from Arabic and Jewish traditions which imbued her with a tremendously powerful sexuality. For Western artists and audiences the queen's eroticism was a natural by-product of her oriental heritage; to be sure, the exotic and erotic colours of the Orient have inundated the popular perceptions of the Queen of Sheba throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. And why not? Does not the mention in 1 Kings of quantities of spices deliberately serve a sensual allusion and give licence to see Sheba in this particular light? The Biblical reference to the mysterious queen from an unknown location, but perhaps from southern Arabia, the locus of ancient spices, is unequivocally erotic in popular conceptions; so much so that, essentially, the prevalent retelling of Sheba's 'story' elaborates on the few biblical verses and finds a way of linking Solomon and Sheba in ways that go far beyond the trade agreement outlined in 1 Kings. Thus the queen who controls the spice trade seduces King Solomon and brings about his downfall. For his part, the king, caught up in Sheba's Oriental beauty, composes a series of poems that exalt her loveliness and eroticism (The Song of Songs) and finally gives Sheba 'all that she desired', a cryptic phrase which scholars,

authors, painters, story-tellers and film-makers alike have usually interpreted in a sexual light. While there are variations on this theme, essentially in nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions the Queen of Sheba's story is made into a romantic fiction of one kind or another.

'I AM NOT A WOMAN, BUT A WORLD':

IMAGINING SHEBA IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The roots of the modern preoccupation with the sexually alluring Oriental Sheba lie in nineteenth-century French literature, German opera, American burlesque and British painting – four distinct artistic genres that significantly influenced one another, especially in recognising the importance of Orientalism in the popular arts. The nineteenth-century vision of the Queen of Sheba is located within two distinct worlds: Oriental fantasy (growing out of the vogue for travel to the Near East) and archaeological precision (blossoming out of the excavations of ancient Near Eastern sites such as Babylon, Nineveh and Persepolis).⁵ Of course, it was difficult for academics and artists to pin down exactly *where* the ancient 'historical' queen had ruled and to precisely locate the kingdom of Sheba itself, but that was almost irrelevant; the general ambience of the

mysterious sensual Orient and the weighty archaeological accounts of ancient Near Eastern civilisations were sufficient to provide her with a heritage rich enough to justify her appearances in the arts of the nineteenth century. The biblical mention of the queen's spices, camels, gold and jewels satisfied the hedonistic taste of the Orientalists while her 'historical' visit to Solomon, the Hebrew king, in his capital of Jerusalem proved sufficient to content the minds of the historians. Therefore, the popular nineteenth-century vision of Sheba's queen grew out of a combination of Orientalism and archaeology.⁶

One of the main sparks that ignited this Orientalist-historical vision of the queen was the work of the British artist Sir Edward John Poynter, whose enormous painting, *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, was first exhibited at Thomas M. McLean's – a dealer with a fashionable London address at 26 Haymarket – in 1890, a small oil sketch of which was shown at the Royal Academy the following year (fig. 1). Poynter's work adroitly manages to contain within the vast spectacle of its canvas the Victorian love of both oriental exoticism and archaeological authenticity. A rapturous report in *The Times* of 17 May 1890 noted that 'the subject is above all things pictorial, and modern archaeology has at least given scope for a great deal of plausible guessing as to what "Solomon in all his glory" was really like'.

The creation of the picture perfectly coincided with other nineteenth-century artistic movements that used the figure of the Queen of Sheba as a focal point for experimentation on the same themes. From the 1870s the Queen of Sheba steadily became the central subject in works of art, literature, music and drama. But in a way Poynter's painting is representative of all the artistic genres as it acknowledges the interplay of narrative, drama, spectacle and even music within its frame. Moreover, the picture was to remain a source of inspiration for nineteenth-century artists, and references to the painting can be traced throughout the twentieth century too; Poynter's influence on the popular visualisation of the Queen of Sheba should not be dismissed lightly.

During the 1860s Poynter made his name as the foremost creator of monumental history paintings, and his *Israel in Egypt* (1867) had firmly established his reputation as a renowned draughtsman who excelled in historical detail and architectural precision. The vast 'Sheba' painting, a product of the academic school and very much in the Victorian taste for the monumental, is truly remarkable for its detailed depiction of Solomon's court.⁷ The architectural elements of the composition were painstakingly based on recent archaeological research in the Near East, particularly the newly discovered palaces of Nineveh and

Persepolis. Research undertaken by James Fergusson in 1851 had attempted to reconstruct Solomon's palace on the lines of archaeological findings of ninth-century BC Near Eastern architecture.⁸ Thus Poynter, using this latest scholarly data (some of it actually excavated by his friend Sir Austen Henry Layard), persevered in creating a historically accurate picture of this building and going so far as to first construct a miniature three-dimensional 'set model' of the reception hall so that he might study the perspective, sight-lines and architectural details better. Poynter thought (with some credibility) that the Solomonic court would have been highly influenced by the aesthetic tastes and modes of the more powerful empires to the east of Israel. Therefore, Poynter's Solomon is dressed in the fringed robes of an Assyrian king, and his court, including the women of the harem and the royal musicians, wear the pleated white linen and richly woven woollen garments familiar to Victorian audiences from the recently discovered Assyrian sculptures displayed in the British Museum.

But hand in hand with this archaeological precision goes Poynter's sense of exotic Orientalism which is best captured in the details of the painting: the table in the foreground laden with gold vessels and pomegranates, the strutting peacocks, the feather fans, the young slave girls and the black-skinned eunuch attendant. The queen herself is an exotic creature too. Her hips are swathed in a richly patterned cloth that ends in a train, her naked torso is draped with jewelled bands and necklaces and her breasts are conspicuously exposed. In the nineteenth century the colour of the Queen of Sheba's skin was the focus of much speculation and the subject of continuing debate. In the Biblical Song of Songs (1:5) it was noted that the female voice sang to her beloved that, 'I am black, but comely'.⁹ The Song's female protagonist had often been identified in nineteenth-century academic literature as the Queen of Sheba and her beloved as none other than Solomon himself. Scholars therefore posed the question that if the Song's female voice was to be equated with Sheba, then was the queen *really* black (as she states) or was her 'blackness' merely to be regarded as symbolic? If she was 'black' then was she Arabian or African? Not surprisingly artistic discourse centred on the same issue: should the queen be depicted as black or white? African, Arabian or, for that matter, purely European? Poynter actively entered into the discourse with his portrayal of the queen. His original sketch for Sheba shows that he used a European woman as his model, but in his subsequent reworking of her image he recast the queen as a dark-skinned beauty, a type of Indian princess, an exotic subject of the British Empire. What caused this ethnic shift is

unknown but it is feasible to suggest that by making his Sheba a dusky-skinned beauty Poynter effectively gave himself the permission to blatantly eroticise her body beneath the jewelled ornaments. Would the queen's breasts have been allowed to be displayed if Poynter had painted a European Sheba? Possibly not. But a breast-exposing bejewelled oriental Sheba was perfectly acceptable to, and even expected by, Victorian audiences. Walter Armstrong's (1890, 3) pamphlet on the painting which was published to coincide with its premiere at McLean's, commented:

Balkis herself blazes with gems. Her costume, if costume we can call it, resembles that of a Hindoo goddess. . . . Behind the Queen stands her black chamberlain; and she is attended by two girls holding fans. . . . Nearer the frame come more Ethiopians kneeling. . . . All these blaze with barbaric colour, suggestive of the lowest civilization of Sheba.

The French author Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) contributed to the popular conception of an erotic bejewelled Eastern Sheba as envisaged by Poynter when he conjured up his literary vision of the queen in his fashionable orientalist novel *Le Tentation de Saint Antoine* (1874).¹⁰ Here it is the queen herself who proclaims her sexually charged Eastern identity. She declares:

All the women you ever met, from the girl at the crossroads singing under her lantern to the patrician high on her litter, plucking rose petals, all the shapes half seen or imagined by your desire, ask for them every one! I am not a woman, but a world. My clothes need only fall away for you to discover in my person one continuous mystery.

The story, based on medieval hagiography, is set in the Egyptian desert during the Late Roman Empire, and centres on the figure of the Christian hermit St Antony and his struggle to resist the demonic temptations of the visions which appear to him in his desolate cave. One of his earliest hallucinations, and certainly the most memorable in the novel, concerns the appearance of the Queen of Sheba, who materialises in front of St Antony sitting cross-legged on the back of an elephant and dressed in the most magnificent apparel:

Her gown of golden brocade, cut across at regular intervals by falbalas of pearl, jet and sapphire, pinches her waist in a tight bodice. . . . She wears very high pattens. . . . Her wide sleeves, garnished with emeralds and birds' feathers, allow a bare view of her little round arm, ornamented at the wrist with an ebony bracelet, and her ring-laden hands are tipped with nails so sharp that her fingers finish almost like needles. . . . A flat golden chain . . . spirals around her blue-powdered hair, and then,

dropping down grazes past her shoulders and clinches over her chest onto a diamond scorpion, which sticks out its tongue between her breasts. Two blond pearls pull at her ears. The edges of her eyelids are painted black . . . and she breathes with her mouth open, as if her corset constricted her. (Flaubert 1874)

The Queen of Sheba tempts Antony with the luxuries of Arabia but he refuses all she proffers until, in one final bid to destroy the saint's steadfastness, she offers him the ultimate gift – her own body. She moves towards the saint in order to kiss his mouth, whispering of the delights to be found in her 'sweet-smelling breasts' but Antony makes the sign of the cross and Sheba recoils in horror, staggering backwards. As she does so a monkey raises her train and reveals her deformed feet. Flaubert does not elaborate on this abnormality, but he clearly had in mind the popular Judaeo-Christian and Islamic medieval legends which claimed that Sheba was cursed with masculine hairy legs and the webbed feet of a goose.¹¹

Flaubert's Sheba is far removed from the virtuous pilgrim portrayed in the storybook Bibles. The Queen of Sheba who, according to early Christian tradition was the first person to identify the significance of the True Cross, suddenly reacts with horror at the sight of Antony's genuflection.¹² She is a vision sent from Hell and plays the role popularly reserved in St Antony's hagiography for the figure of Luxuria (Luxury), usually represented by a naked woman. But Flaubert does not draw on Christian tradition here since the emphasis placed on the queen's elaborately costumed body is typical of the discourse of sex that runs through all of Flaubert's orientalist works. As Edward Said noted:

In all of his novels Flaubert associates the Orient with the escapism of sexual fantasy. [His novels] are packed [with] Oriental clichés: harems, princesses, princes, slaves, veils, dancing girls and boys, sherbets, ointments and so on. . . . The association is clearly made between the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.¹³

Just as Orientalism permitted Poynter to paint Sheba's naked breasts, so Orientalism granted Flaubert the licence to transform the queen into a seductive figure of unrestrained sexuality. Gérard de Nerval (1808–55) was also an orientalist author, and for him the Queen of Sheba was 'a fatal obsession'.¹⁴ His *Voyage en Orient* (1851) contained the novella *Histoire de la reine du matin et de Soliman prince des génies*, a story taken from Qur'anic, Jewish and even Masonic sources. Balkis, Queen of Sheba, a woman of great beauty and intellect, arrives in Jerusalem intending to marry Solomon if his reputation for wisdom matches

her own. Solomon and all his court welcome her, save for the lone figure of Adoniram, the king's chief architect, who keeps his distance, realising the natural incompatibility of the descendants of Cain (the Sabaeans) and the offspring of Abel (the Hebrews). The queen is impressed with Adoniram's knowledge and rejects Solomon, whom she declares to have an inferior wisdom to her own. Balkis begins a passionate love affair with Adoniram, which results in the birth of a child, but the scandal forces her to leave Israel and return to Sheba. Adoniram attempts to follow her but is murdered on the orders of the vengeful Solomon. For his part, the scorned king surrounds himself with beautiful women from across the globe, but finds no contentment in his harem and dies a lonely, embittered man.

De Nerval's inspiration for Balkis is unknown, but she may have been one of the women he encountered on his travels in the Middle East throughout the 1840s. Whatever the case, like Flaubert and Poynter, he was clearly enraptured by the spirit of the erotic ancient Orient: his Queen of Sheba is 'a lily strayed into a field of dandelions'. He notes that she has the 'beauty of a sphinx, with black eyes like those of gazelles, and a mouth trembling between a smile and seduction'.¹⁵ De Nerval had contemplated writing the libretto for an opera based around the figure of the Queen of Sheba, but as it transpired his ambition was only realised posthumously in 1862 with the premiere of Charles Gounod's *La Reine de Saba* at the Paris Opéra. The libretto, by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, was a trimmed-down version of de Nerval's *Histoire de la reine du matin*, but it failed to capture the public's imagination despite some memorable music. Audiences criticised the opera for its improbable story that both destroyed the mystery of the Queen of Sheba by turning her into a flighty chorus girl and made a fool of the towering figure of Solomon by making him a cuckold. Not even the eruptions of an on-stage volcano at the climax of Act II managed to save the work.

In 1875, however, Karl Goldmark (1830–1915) premiered his opera *Die Königin von Saba* in Vienna to great public acclaim. The subject matter of the opera shared with Bizet's *Djamileh*, Delibes's *Lakmé* and Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila* a delight in Eastern sensuality and was a musical counterpart to Poynter's painting and to other works of the orientalist school. The libretto by Salomon Hermann von Mosenthal brimmed with love, deceit and betrayal and centred once again on a romantic triangle, but this time between Assad, a Hebrew nobleman betrothed to Princess Sulamith (the daughter of Solomon), and the Queen of Sheba, a sexual temptress lifted straight from

the pages of Flaubert, whose role in the opera was to seduce, attack, demand and trigger off a number of dramatic conflicts. Goldmark's Sheba has been seen as a demonic pagan 'Queen of the Night' who destroys the pure love of Assad and Sulamith and battles for her own interests against the sober wisdom of the monotheist Solomon, who (it must be admitted) plays a comparatively minor role in the opera. The dramatic action takes place amid the splendid pillared halls of Solomon's palace and the Jerusalem temple, and the set designs from the original production by Carlo Brioschi incorporated the figures of mighty Assyrian winged bulls, Persian solar discs and Babylonian roaring lions, and testify yet again to the nineteenth-century love of archaeological reconstruction.¹⁶ In fact, the set and costume designs for the opera share many of the features found in Poynter's later painting.

Die Königin von Saba is a skilful combination of Mayerbeerian-style grand opera, with its spectacle scenes and historical subject matter, and the more fluid orchestral style of Wagner. There are moments of intense lyricism in the music, but the most striking feature of the opera is the use of various kinds of oriental local colour, ranging from the lush exoticism of the Queen of Sheba's theme to the stately religious music of the Jewish temple. The great set pieces of the opera include the orgiastic spectacle of the Sabaeans at prayer in Act III and, of course, the Act I arrival of the Queen of Sheba.¹⁷ The libretto's stage directions give a detailed rendition of the stage action and Poynter's painting is brought to mind yet again:

The procession of the Queen of Sheba's followers appears, slaves with vessels of gold and other materials, filled with gold dust and pearls, precious stones and spices. Fantastic groupings. The Queen . . . appears, carried on a palanquin. She is helped to descend by slaves. . . . The Queen is bedecked with jewels and pearls. From her crowned turban hangs a veil interwoven with gold threads, which enwraps her entire figure. . . . She removes her veil. Assad gazes at the Queen, who gives him an icy look.

At the close of the nineteenth century the oriental splendour of the operatic, literary and artistic visions of the Queen of Sheba were combined into one further type of spectacle, but this time far removed from the respectable sanctity of the opera house, the art gallery or even the printed page. The *fin de siècle* saw the Queen of Sheba turned into a circus performer.

'Spectacle' performances had been a major vehicle in nineteenth-century popular entertainment since the 1840s, but the end of the century saw the appeal of staged extravaganzas escalate on an unprecedented scale. Historical spectacles were particularly favoured: in the 1880s James Pain staged (originally in Britain,

FIG. 2 'Stupendous Spectacle: Solomon and the Queen of Sheba', Ringling Brothers Poster, 1914. (Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin)



then Europe and America) the first of his successful pyrodrasmas, or 'outdoor pictures with fireworks', *The Last Days of Pompeii*.¹⁸ The epic thrill of historical spectacles captured the public imagination and soon theatrical entrepreneurs worldwide were vying with one another to see who could produce the biggest, best and most dramatic historical pageant. The story of the Queen of Sheba's arrival into Jerusalem had a particular appeal, advocating as it did a splendid display of exotic beasts and beautiful women. Between 1891 and 1896 many American towns were treated to the spectacle of John Robinson's Great World Exposition's production of *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*, a thirty-minute spectacle that began with a wild-beast parade and climaxed in a 'Grand Ballet – the most beautiful and chaste Terpsichorean Divertissement', performed by a line-up of scantily clad beauties known as 'Sheba's Girls'.¹⁹ The performance was damned from the pulpits of America as an 'immoral ballet . . . clothed in religious respectability', a condemnation which remained largely ignored by the general public, who could not get enough of the exposed thighs of Sheba's pretty attendants.²⁰

Not to be outdone or outclassed by this titillating extravaganza, America's greatest showmen, Barnum and Bailey, staged their opulent *Tribute of Balkis* in 1903, labelling it as 'a veritable vision of ancient glo-

ries, marches, tableaux, dancing girls, mounted guards and truly lavish displays of costumes, animated life and colour'. As part of the performance, parades of Indian elephants and other exotic beasts were marched past huge crowds of spectators, and were followed by lines of 'countless dancing girls . . . as far as the eye could see'.²¹ Each girl wore a suggestive peek-a-boo costume of chiffon and feathers and together they performed an 'orientalised' version of the popular dance craze, the hootchy-cootch.

The last of the Sheba spectacles was produced by the Ringling Brothers in 1915, in which a certain (and very respectable) Mrs Bartik of Baraboo, Wisconsin, played the queen and was, according to the newspaper reports, accompanied by 300 dancing girls, 735 horses, 400 singers and a 90-piece orchestra. Advertisements announced that the Ringling Brothers' *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* was a particularly lavish show, 'pulsating in wealth of wondrous colour. The days of Solomon and the beautiful Queen of Sheba flash forth from the dimness of the ages'.²² To judge from the colourful poster images, the Brothers had drawn their inspiration for the pageant from Poynter's influential painting produced two decades earlier (fig. 2). As was the case in 1890, the 1915 vision of Sheba's queen and her train also managed to blend an archaeologically credible vision of the ancient



FIG. 3 Dressing as the Queen of Sheba for a charity matinée tableau (in aid of the war effort) entitled 'Biblical Beauties'; illustration from *Punch*, 1917.

Near East with a fantastic dazzling vision of oriental opulence.

'I COULD PASS YOU OFF AS THE QUEEN OF SHEBA': INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In 1916 George Bernard Shaw premiered his social comedy *Pygmalion* to wide critical acclaim. The story famously tells of the cockney flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, who is coached and educated in the manners, customs and language of the English aristocracy by Professor Higgins, an eccentric and misogynistic professor of linguistics. In his enthusiasm for his pet project Higgins asserts, 'In three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party'; and even though Higgins declares Eliza to be an 'incarnate insult to the English language', he confidently convinces her that, 'I could pass you off as the Queen of Sheba'.²³

In the opening decades of the twentieth century the Queen of Sheba became the embodiment of feminine luxury and caprice. In common parlance, for a woman to be labelled 'the Queen of Sheba' meant that she was haughty, spoiled, well-appointed and lavish – or at least had the aspirations to be. In *Pygmalion* Professor Higgins follows up his promise to turn Eliza into a modern-day Queen of Sheba by predicting that 'the streets will be strewn with the bodies of men shooting themselves for your sake before I've done with you. . . . Think of chocolates, and taxis, and gold, and diamonds.' In other words, if Eliza is to be passed off as the Queen of Sheba, then she must aim to be the Queen of Sheba and she must set her sights on the kind of things the Queen of Sheba desires – luxurious living and a reputation as something of a *femme fatale*.

It is not surprising that Shaw represented the queen in such a way since late Victorian and Edwardian popular culture consciously fostered the associations between Sheba and opulence. This is perhaps best illustrated by the appearances of the Queen of Sheba at several extravagant fancy dress balls held throughout the period.²⁴ The penchant for society ladies to masquerade as famous beauties from antiquity reached its apex with the most lavish of the aristocratic fancy dress galas hosted by the Duchess of Devonshire in 1897, at which there were no less than five Cleopatras, three Zenobias and two Shebas, namely Lady Cynthia Graham and Daisy Cornwallis-West, the Princess of Pless.²⁵

The vogue for dressing up as the Queen of Sheba continued into the opening decades of the twentieth century: a pretty illustration from a *Punch* magazine of December 1917 (fig. 3), for example, depicts an elegant young socialite costuming herself as the Queen of Sheba for a charity matinée tableau (in aid of the war effort) entitled 'Biblical Beauties'. Her strapless gown is a confection of gauze, chiffon and pearls, and perched on top of her head is a tiny tiara decorated with a crescent moon, an ensemble which the young woman's companion declares to be 'absolutely topping'.²⁶

The Queen of Sheba's story was popular in early twentieth-century literature too, although she tended to be presented in this period not as Flaubert's lustful seductress but as a beautiful, wise and virtuous ruler. In 1902 Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) included a charming fable about the Queen of Sheba in one of his *Just So Stories*, 'The Butterfly that Stamped', in which Balkis is the Chief Wife in Solomon's harem of a thousand quarrelsome queens. But Balkis is Solomon's soul mate and in the story she uses her wit and compassion to help resolve the marital problems of a frustrated butterfly and to simultaneously bring Solomon the serenity he desires. The oriental fantasy ends with an enchanting little rhyme:

There was never a Queen like Balkis,
From here to the wide world's end;
But Balkis talked to a butterfly
As you would talk to a friend.
There was never a King like Solomon,
Not since the world began;
But Solomon talked to a butterfly
As a man would talk to a man.
She was Queen of Sabaea –
And he was Asia's Lord –
But they both of 'em talked to butterflies
When they took their walks abroad!

In the 1920s the Queen of Sheba, a female ruler renowned for her wit and wisdom, emerged as a

representational figure of women's liberation, not so much in the political arena but in the cultural sphere. She became a 'fast girl', a flapper, in 1922 with the publication of a book entitled *The Queen of Sheba: Her Life and Times*, written anonymously under the pseudonym Phineas Crutch. It was an amusing parody of the works of Flaubert and de Nerval, the Bible and the pedantries of modern scholarship. Balkis, the only daughter of Jehaz, King of Sheba, and his Scythian concubine, an ex-exotic rope-dancer, the aptly named Shimhi, is a very modern girl, a tomboy in effect. 'Crutch' parodies contemporary scholarly biographies as he describes the queen's formative education:

She was unusually proficient in cuneiform and hieroglyphics . . . but had absolutely no head for figures. . . . To her dying day she could never master the number of finger-breadths in a palm, nor the table of spans, cubits and reeds. Gaston Poteau attributes much of her later enthusiasm for travel to her utter misconception of distances. . . . In the higher branches of culture she received instruction in sarcophagus painting, mummy gilding, stone carving, and papyrus chewing, as well as in the arts of perfumery, cosmetics, double-dyeing and depilation, palmistry, chiropody and poisoning. She was a finished performer on the lute . . . and a matchless exponent of the dance, both sacred and profane, and, of course, an accomplished camel-woman.²⁷

The notion of Eastern fantasy still runs throughout these images of course. Kipling's tale has the appeal of a Scheherazade story, and the flights of imagination made manifest in the fancy dress costumes of the society beauties are profoundly influenced by the orientalist paintings of the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. In the opening decades of the twentieth century Europe and America were in the grip of a wave of exotic and erotic orientalist fantasies such as the Ballet Russe's *Sheherazade*, Richard Strauss's opera *Salome*, and the erotic dance performances of Mata Hari and Little Egypt. In fact Sheba herself danced in a ballet composed by Respighi, *Belkis, regina di Saba*, in 1931, which had all the oriental colouring of *Sheherazade* but was paced more effectively as a ballet:

The birds and the winds have told Solomon that he is loved from afar by Belkis, Queen of Sheba. He sends for her and she travels across the desert in a huge treasure-laden caravan of warriors, slaves, elephants and camels. Her meeting with Solomon is celebrated with tumultuous and bawdy rejoicing. The King and Queen consummate their passion and she returns to Sheba 'with all that she desired'. But the Queen of Sheba made her most prominent

appearances in the visual arts, particularly in the glorious watercolours of Edmund Dulac where she sits bejewelled and turbaned on the back of a camel in a painting commissioned by *L'Illustration* magazine of 1911, or appears as 'the Beloved', stretched out on cushions, in his 1934 illustrations for *The Song of Solomon*.²⁸ The queen was also represented by William Russell Flint in his illustrations for *The Song of Solomon* in 1907. One particularly fine watercolour depicts an imperious-looking Sheba sitting on a high Assyrian-style throne as Solomon prostrates himself in front of her; another represents a beautiful ivory-skinned queen riding at the side of Solomon in his royal chariot.²⁹

'THIS QUEEN WAS A SON OF A BITCH': SHEBA IN HOLLYWOOD

Given Sheba's popularity in early twentieth-century culture, her appearance in that era's hottest and most momentous craze, the moving picture, was inevitable. From its earliest conception, the genre of film was fascinated with history, particularly the events of Classical antiquity and the world of the Bible. The limitations of the stage were swept away by film's ability to capture massive and spectacular events in outdoor locations, as hundreds of costumed extras swarmed over gigantic sets and began to fill the screen with recreations of epic battles, great disasters, miracles and sensational love stories.³⁰

The Old Testament naturally offered itself as a vehicle to filmmakers, perhaps because the narrative stories and larger-than-life characters were so well known to cinema audiences, who could therefore appreciate more fully the director's skill in adapting the Bible to a visual medium. But that does not mean that Biblical epics were overly reverential; on the contrary, directors felt at liberty to embellish the Old Testament tales with a liberal coating of eroticism, sensuality and, of course, Orientalism. Cecil B. DeMille is supposed to have said that it would be possible to make a film from any three pages of the Bible, but in the case of the Queen of Sheba's story, with so little Biblical material to go on, directors and scriptwriters felt free to improvise their own versions of the queen's life. The results were particularly inventive.

The Queen of Sheba's first appearance on the Hollywood silver screen was in 1909, in a small cameo role in Vitagraph's *The Judgement of Solomon*, but it was in 1921 that she became a headline attraction with the release of Fox's lavish silent movie, *Queen of Sheba*, directed by J. Gordon Edwards and starring the delectably racy and vampish Betty Blythe. Advertised as 'Exotic in its Beauty, Mammoth in its Proportions, Dynamic in its Unparalleled Splendour',



FIG. 4 Betty Blythe in the title role of *Queen of Sheba*, 1921: cover of *Kinematograph*, December 1921. (The Trustees of The British Museum, ANE Ephemera 130)

The Queen of Sheba told the familiar story of the queen's 'love romance' with King Solomon (Fritz Lieber), boasting 671 scenes, 10,000 actors and 500 camels. The climax of the picture (with the orchestra going full blast in the pit) was a bizarre but thrilling

chariot race between the Queen of Sheba and her arch-rival, Queen Vashti (somehow making an appearance from the Biblical Book of Esther). *The New York Times* of 11 April 1921 suggested that in this scene might be found the ancient origin of the



FIG. 5 Gina Lollobrigida as the Queen of Sheba in *Solomon and Sheba*, 1959. (United Artists Corporation Ltd)

modern feminist movement as Vashti takes control of a male-dominated sport and challenges Sheba to race her on the track; of course, Sheba wins.

Curiously, the film was reluctant to mention Solomon's harem of 700 wives and 300 concubines but nevertheless populated the screen with dozens of scantily clad women which made it appear, reported *The New York Times* again, 'that the Ziegfeld Frolic had been borrowed for the production'. At the head of the chorus line was Betty Blythe, attired in a series of flesh-revealing gowns mainly composed of strings of pearls and panels of chiffon (fig. 4). In spite of the titillating costumes, the *Milwaukee Journal* of 21 November 1921 duly noted that Miss Blythe's Sheba was 'voluptuous without vulgarity'.

Following Blythe's memorable screen interpretation, the Queen of Sheba absented herself from Hollywood cinema for almost four decades, although she did make an appearance in the 1952 Italian feature *La regina di Saba*, in the likeness of Leonora Ruffo. The

story follows the adventures of Rehoboam (Gino Leurini), the son of Solomon (Gino Cervi), who leaves Jerusalem to spy on Balkis, Queen of Sheba, Israel's national enemy. Naturally, he falls in love with her and there follows a run-of-the-mill romance peppered with some tongue-in-cheek heroism from the young male lead.³¹

In 1959 Hollywood turned its attention to the queen again and cast the fabulously beautiful Gina Lollobrigida, another Italian, as Sheba.³² Directed by King Vidor, *Solomon and Sheba* conflated the familiar Biblical story of the queen's visit to Solomon (Yul Brynner)³³ with his passion for foreign women and a tolerance for their gods (as recounted in 1 Kings 11:1–8) and added several political themes.³⁴ Gina Lollobrigida's heavy Italian accent, gypsyish olive-skinned look, black hair and dark doe-eyes gives Sheba an appropriately exotic flavour; she completely dominates the film. While it has been praised for its 'all-round breadth of vision',³⁵ *Solomon and Sheba* is nevertheless firmly rooted in the jewel-in-the-navel and the lady-in-the-bath tub school of films (see cat. 9). As Sheba, Lollobrigida wears a series of Christian Dior-inspired 'Biblical' gowns, reflecting the fashions of 1959 Paris but not of ninth-century BC Israel, and has a habit of throwing around golden platters and alabaster vases in her regular outbursts of on-screen anger. A review from the film magazine *Schermi* (20 January 1960) notes how 'La Lollo has a tête-à-tête with Solomon-Brynner, for which she wears a very transparent nocturnal combination, destined to become part of post-war erotic iconography' (fig. 5). The film's 'highlight', the pagan orgy in honour of the god Ragon, finds Sheba dressed in the robes of the High Priestess of Love – a flimsy jewelled brassière, navel-exposing scarlet skirt, and toenails painted 'pomegranate shade' – in which she gyrates and pulsates her hips in a frenzied (but balletic) dance in honour of her god. Unfortunately, not all critics were appreciative of 'La Lollo's' skills: 'the dancing of Miss Lollobrigida . . . is awkward and visibly uncertain', complained Paul Buckley of the *New York Herald Tribune* (26 December 1959).

Despite the historical inaccuracies, official (and typical) Hollywood rhetoric stressed the authenticity of the story itself and of the production design in general.³⁶ The 1959 *Solomon and Sheba* press-book, for example, noted that 'all Miss Lollobrigida's 24 separate costumes . . . were absolutely authentic and would bring full approval from Biblical scholars and historical experts'. Even Lollobrigida saw her performance as a process of historical recreation and clearly believed that Sheba was an identifiable historical personage.³⁷ She described her role as the greatest that any actress had

ever undertaken, noting that, 'there is only one trouble with having played the most famous courtesan of all time and that is that after Sheba all roles will certainly seem tame and anti-climatic'.³⁸ Trying to give her character some historical verification, Lollobrigida noted with a scholar's authority: 'This Queen was a son of a bitch. She was too interested in politics, so she tried to destroy Solomon. Solomon was all right'.³⁹

(No) CONCLUSION:

BRINGING SHEBA INTO THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

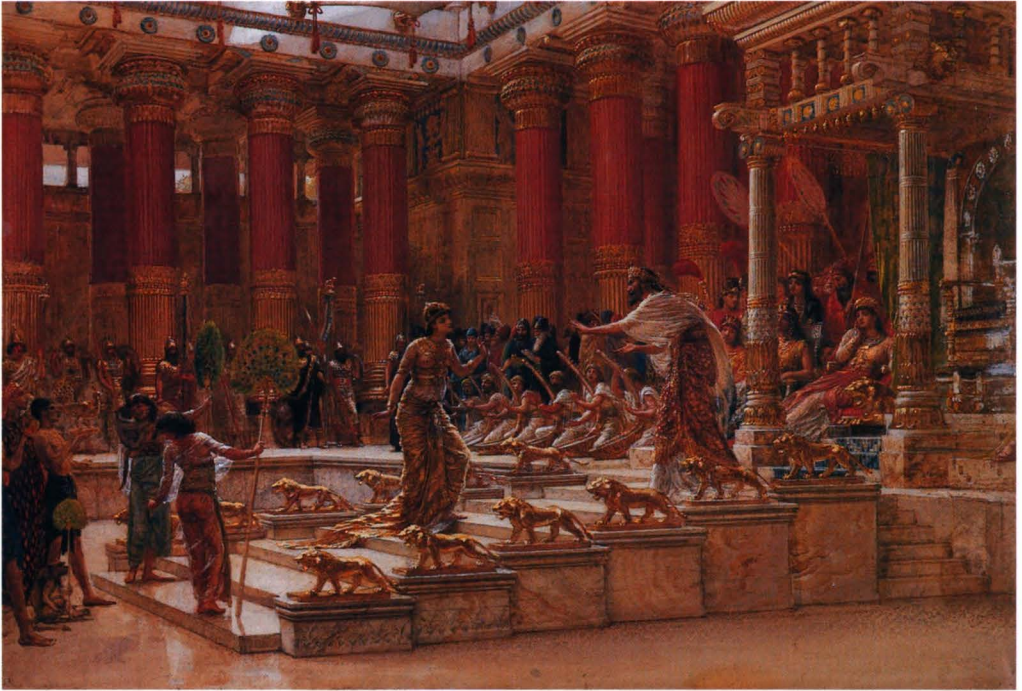
Despite Gina Lollobrigida's exotic Mediterranean looks, Hollywood's Queen of Sheba is entirely modelled on standard Western concepts of feminine beauty; her hour-glass figure is a perfect symbol of 1950s womanhood. In *Solomon and Sheba* the question of the queen's ethnicity is never raised, nor is the locale of her kingdom addressed. The Land of Sheba is merely identified as an exotic, colourful, feminine realm, populated by a pleasure-loving people given over to the ecstatic worship of primeval gods, but is never given a specific geographic location. It is a fantasyland of sex and beauty. It is Arabian in essence but it is not expressly located in the Yemen. It is certainly not to be found in Africa for neither the queen nor her Sabaeen subjects are black-skinned. The Hollywood glamour-factory of the 1950s did not employ black actresses in major roles, certainly not in the Christianised and sanctified genre of the Biblical epic. In 1959 a black Sheba was inconceivable.

In 1995, however, an American television film *Solomon and Sheba* cast the popular African-American actress Halle Berry in the role of the queen; it was the first film to acknowledge the possibility that the 'historical' Sheba was dark-skinned. Nevertheless, for all its integrity the TV version of *Solomon and Sheba* was a frothy affair with little dramatic weight or credibility: Sheba infiltrates Solomon's court disguised as a boy in order that she might test his wisdom and ends up saving his life when she discovers a plot against him orchestrated by his treasonous son.⁴⁰

Riding on the back of the publicity stirred up by Berry's portrayal of the African queen came the 1997 Italian-American television co-production *Solomon*, a far more historically authoritative and coherent version of the Sheba story – although the film is still ultimately a romance. When Solomon (Ben Cross) meets the beautiful Queen of Sheba (Vivica A. Fox) he falls in love with her, but when the time comes for her to return to her homeland Solomon is unable to convince her to stay. Bereft of her beauty and company, he falls into a deep depression and departs from his once idyllic world of peace and luxury while his kingdom threatens to collapse.⁴¹ In this intelligent film, which

adheres closely to the Scriptures, the black Queen of Sheba is unambiguously said to have come from the east coast of Africa, although her costumes betray strong links with Arabia too, for this queen spends much of the first half of the film swathed in veils which conceal much of her body and face; these are the kinds of garments most closely associated in the popular mind with the Middle East. It is only in the intimate scenes with Solomon that her veils are removed and the camera plays on the beauty of her black skin as she lies on a divan of crisp white linen or bathes in a silver moonlit sea.

The Queen of Sheba has been an influential figure in nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular culture. She has been integrated into orientalist and feminist discourses; she has been a champion for the early women's liberation movement, but also the focus of male sexual fantasy; she has been the acme of Western concepts of female beauty and, more recently, the champion of black feminist identity. Sheba is an image, an ideal. She belongs to the tradition of three major religions, each of which conjure up her vision in different terms – as a seductress, a demoness, a wife and a whore. What is certain about the Queen of Sheba is that here, at the start of a new millennium, the quest to identify the woman in the myth, the attempt to qualify her, and to find a meaning to her story has not yet reached its finale. There can be no conclusion to Sheba's story.



SIR EDWARD JOHN POYNTER (1836–1919)

1 *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon, c. 1882*

Watercolour heightened with bodycolour,
35.4 × 51.5 cm (sight)
Private collection, UK

Poynter worked throughout the 1880s on one of the largest and most important works of his career: *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, now a centrepiece in the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. In line with his academic training, Poynter undertook numerous preliminary drawings for the figures, drapery and accessories – over seventy are recorded – as well as studies of the entire composition, including this highly finished watercolour and a small oil sketch (Inglis 1997, 90–93). The watercolour was executed around 1882 and reveals that the artist had already established the most important elements of the composition: the meeting between the exotic queen and the great Solomon takes place before a throng of richly attired courtiers. The two rulers face each other on the steps of Solomon's imposing

'lion throne', their encounter almost overwhelmed by the sumptuous architecture of the reception hall. The whole scene is depicted with a wealth of scholarly detail. The artist has supplemented the relatively brief Biblical account of Solomon's palace – which mentions the stone foundations, pillars and beams of cedar, gold and brass decoration, and the king's throne – with physical evidence drawn from recent archaeological discoveries in Assyria and Iran. Poynter's approach was influenced by the architectural historian, James Fergusson, and the archaeologist, Sir Austen Henry Layard (1817–94), who argued that the buildings at Persepolis and Nineveh provided valuable information about the appearance of the 'great edifices' of the Old Testament, in particular the 'House of Solomon' (Fergusson 1851, 224; Layard 1853, vol. 2, 642–4). Many of the architectural features and artefacts in Poynter's watercolour are based on archaeological examples in the British Museum or else drawn from design books such as Owen Jones's (1856, 27) *Grammar of Ornament*. Solomon's canopied dais, for instance, shows the artist drawing

inspiration from the elaborately carved thrones and footstools that appear in many of the Nineveh reliefs (Curtis and Reade eds 1995, 122–3). It also demonstrates Poynter's ability to transform imaginatively an Assyrian source into a more grandiose vision of 'what "Solomon in all his glory" was really like'. At



Photograph of Sir Edward John Poynter, 1892,
by Ralph Winnood Robinson. (NPG, London)



SIR EDWARD JOHN POYNTER (1836–1919)

2 Study for the 'lion throne' of King Solomon in *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, c. 1883–9

Black and white chalk on olive green paper,
26.3 × 19 cm (sight)
Private collection, UK

One of the most striking features in Poynter's reconstruction of Solomon's palace is the magnificent throne. The Bible provides a detailed description of this 'great

throne of ivory ... overlaid ... with the best gold', which the artist followed closely:

The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind ... and twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom (1 Kings 10:18–20).

The twelve golden lions in Poynter's oil painting were inspired by an Assyrian sculpture in the British Museum – a colossal stone lion 'with extended jaws, gathered up lips and nostrils', discovered in 1849 by the great archaeologist, Sir Austen Henry Layard, originally one of a pair flanking the entrance to the Temple of Ishtar on the Late Assyrian citadel of Nimrud in northern Iraq (ANE 118895; Layard 1853, vol. 2, 359). But as the original sculpture was both large and carved from a single block, the artist based his detailed preparatory studies of the lions upon smaller 'models made from his own design' (Monkhouse 1899, 257). Despite his modifications, most nineteenth-century commentators emphasised the archaeological authority of Poynter's lion throne, which one writer described as having 'an archaic kind of restraint about it, notwithstanding the richness of the materials' (Jackson 1897, 164). AI

SIR EDWARD JOHN POYNTER (1836–1919)

3 Nude study for the figure of King Solomon in *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, c. 1881–2

Green chalk on white paper, squared in pencil,
30.1 × 20.5 cm (sight)

Inscribed in pencil, lower right,
'Solomon in the Queen of Sheba'

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA 1971.26

Presented by Clarissa C. Bell, niece of the artist

This drawing of a male nude is a study for the figure of King Solomon in Poynter's watercolour. In this work the Queen of Sheba is shown boldly quizzing the king, her hand raised in a questioning gesture. He, in turn, appears to reach out in welcome or response – a dramatic pose that underlines the intensity of their exchange. In the large oil painting, the artist chose to shift the narrative emphasis from the queen's initial 'testing' to the later moment of Solomon's triumph. He has now answered 'all her



questions', and the full impact of his wisdom – added to the physical splendour of his court – leaves the queen with 'no more spirit in her' (1 Kings 10:3–5). This change in attitude is clearly indicated by her downcast gaze. The result is a stately but conventional image of a suppliant before a ruler – a far cry from the vivid encounter depicted in the earlier watercolour.

AI

SIR EDWARD JOHN POYNTER (1836–1919)

4 Study for one of the musicians playing a harp in *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, c. 1883–9

Black and white chalk on terracotta paper, 37.9 × 27.3 cm

The British Museum, London, PD 1931-6-13,14

Presented by Charles Francis Bell, nephew of the artist

The Biblical reference to 'harps ... and psalteries for singers' in Solomon's palace (1 Kings 10:12) allowed Poynter to include an impressive tier of court musicians alongside the king's throne. Nineteenth-century scholars speculated that Hebrew musical instruments (of which none survived) would have been 'closely related to [those] ... of the Egyptians and Assyrians' (Engel 1864, 277, 280). Thus, Poynter's singing figures are shown playing large arched or bow harps, whose scale and curved design is based upon ancient Egyptian examples. The artist would have known of these historical harps from source books, such as J.G. Wilkinson's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* (1837, vol. 2, 269–88) or from original sculptures in the British Museum (Anderson 1976, 72–80). Poynter's chalk drawing of a harpist – the fourth from the left in the large oil painting – is only one of numerous studies undertaken for the composition. As one critic observed:

On no work did he spend greater care in preparation. ... Every detail of architecture and armour ... every accessory in the shape of vessels and musical instruments ... was the object of conscientious care (Monkhouse 1899, 257).

AI



SIR EDWARD JOHN POYNTER (1836–1919)

5 Study for one of the Queen of Sheba's tribute bearers in *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, c. 1883–9

Black and white chalks on olive green paper, squared, 29.1 × 13.6 cm (sight)

The British Museum, London, PD 1919-12-16.35

Purchased from Charles Francis Bell, representing the executors of the estate of the late Sir Edward Poynter

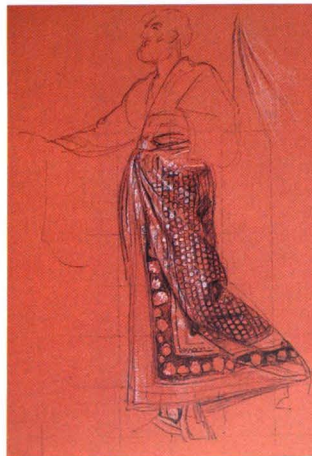
In his pamphlet on Poynter's oil painting, published to accompany its exhibition in 1890, Walter Armstrong described the Queen of Sheba's entourage in some detail:

Behind the queen stands her black chamberlain; and she is attended by two girl slaves. ... Nearer the frame come more Ethiopians kneeling ... bearing specimens [of] ... vessels of gold, and 'of spices ... and precious stones'. ... All these blaze with barbaric colour, suggestive of the lowest civilization of Sheba (Armstrong 1890, 3).

Poynter was well aware of the artistic tradition in which the Queen of Sheba's exotic origins were conveyed by the inclusion of black servants in her train. African 'tribute bearers' appear in both the watercolour and oil versions of the subject. But unlike most Old Masters' depictions in which the queen is shown as a European monarch, Poynter portrays her as a foreigner, both in features and attire. Indeed, several reviewers commented on his queen's 'Indian type of olive beauty' (*Saturday Review*, 21 June 1890, 768) or described her costume as 'a combination of that of an Egyptian and an Indian Queen' (*The Times*, 17 May 1890, 17). This full-length study of one of the queen's African attendants differs from the final painted figure in certain details: the latter wears an elaborate headdress and holds aloft a peacock standard instead of a tray. AI



5



6

SIR JOHN EDWARD POYNTER (1836–1919)

6 Drapery study for King Solomon in *The Queen of Sheba's Visit to King Solomon*, c. 1883–9

Black and white chalks on terracotta paper, squared, 32 × 22.4 cm

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, WA 1955.58

While Solomon's palace provoked much comment, attention also focused on the magnificence of the costumes. The queen's dress attracted the most interest, being described by the critic of *The Times* as 'a wonderful garment, half skirt, half shawl, of some rich tissue, embroidered at the edge in the fashion that has prevailed in the East from time immemorial' (17 May 1890, 17). Other writers suggested that Poynter had set up a deliberate contrast between the queen's 'barbaric' splendour and Solomon's 'comparatively quiet colours' and simpler attire (Armstrong 1890, 3). In creating these Old Testament costumes, Poynter drew upon various sources. Solomon's divided skirts and conical crown, for instance, bear some resemblance to figures on Assyrian reliefs. A description by the artist's nephew Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936) in 1889 reveals that Poynter was equally willing to supplement historical detail with modern Indian textiles:

Inspect[ed] Poynter's new picture wh[ic]h he says will be the masterpiece of his life. It's Old Brer Solomon coming down the steps of his throne to welcome Sis Sheby as she comes along with apes and peacocks and all that truck. I never saw such a blaze of colour or jumble of notions in my life. Soll[om]on in stamped blue and red Peshawurlac cloth. Sheba in Delhi brocade and Kenkab ... 'I thought it was oriental' said Poynter 'and no one knows any better here.' It's mighty curious to see behind an R.A.'s piccy and note the bits of things it is made up of (Pinney ed. 1990, 369–70).

AI



JOHN DUNCAN (1866–1945)

7 *Ivory, Apes and Peacocks*, 1923

Watercolour on board, 101.6 × 152.4 cm

Signed 'DUNCAN 1923'

Deposited as a Diploma work 1923

The Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, 2000.062

This work is one of the most flamboyant representations of the Queen of Sheba, created by John Duncan, a Scottish symbolist artist (Kemplay 1994, 74). Despite its exhibited title, this watercolour is also known as *The Queen of Sheba* because the subject is clearly the visit of Sheba to Solomon's court; the title, in fact, is taken from the Old Testament description of Solomon's navy of Tharshish, which 'once in three years came ... bringing gold, and silver, ivory and apes, and peacocks' (1 Kings 10:22). The picture is a whimsical flight of fantasy blending together the familiar themes of Orientalism, eroticism and history into a delicate watercolour mirage. The bare-breasted Queen of Sheba sits cross-

legged in a palanquin, high atop an elephant's back; her skin is as white as the elephant's tusks or the bleached peacocks strutting alongside her colourful train, and her long hair is golden-blond. Duncan has captured the queen of Flaubert's imagination.

The picture was conceived in the spring of 1913, although Duncan did not begin colouring his first sketch until 1915. Eventually he completed three versions of the subject, this watercolour and two in tempera (one of which was sold in New York in 1992). He found particular satisfaction in the subject matter since he considered there was a certain kind of beauty found 'in Egyptian things' (see Kemplay 1994, 67 ff.).

The watercolour was first exhibited in the Annual Exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy in 1923 (*Annual Report* 1923, 356), giving rise to the withering comment that 'Mr Duncan displays his playful and unfailing ingenuity in the invention of patter and incident, but misses the glamour Mr

Masefield gives a verse in a haunting little poem by a seemingly artless use of the words Mr Duncan has for a title' (*The Scotsman*, 4 June 1923; Royal Scottish Academy, Fourth Notice). At the same time, a play written by Jonkheer Six called *The Queen of Sheba* was performed in Amsterdam. Surviving production photographs of this show the actors costumed in swathes of uncut fabrics (Indian shawls and saris), not unlike those worn by the figures in Duncan's watercolour (Du Mortier 2000, 52–4).¹

This watercolour has been exhibited a number of times recently: at Edinburgh, Royal Scottish Academy 150th Anniversary Exhibition, 1976 (no. 29); London, Fine Art Society, 1976 (Royal Scottish Academy 1826–1976, 11); Edinburgh, College of Art, 1982 (*Patrick Geddes, On the Side of Life*) and London, Barbican Art Gallery, 1989 (*The Last Romantics*, 395).

LL-J/S

¹ We are very grateful to Dr Roger Simpson for kindly drawing our attention to these.



8

8 Mary Teresa Cornwallis-West, Princess Henry of Pless, as the Queen of Sheba for the Devonshire House Ball, 1897

Lafayette studio photograph (1853–1923),
35.4 × 27.8 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, LAF 1597(A)

According to a report in the *Daily Telegraph*, dated 3 July 1897, the Queen of Sheba costume worn by the Princess (1873–1943) was a dress of purple and gold shot gauze. The bodice, the skirt ... and the train was one mass of jewels, thickly encrusted medallions of raised gold. Turquoises, bearing hieroglyphics, were a prominent part in the design, which included yellow, red, purple, green, blue and white stones. There was a sash of cloth of gold also jeweled superbly, and the Assyrian badge worn in front of the bodice at the waistline. An Assyrian headdress, with jewels over either ear, and a high jeweled stiff feather and chains of diamonds and turquoise worn slung on either arm from shoulder to wrist, completed the costume of the utmost magnificence.

This photograph of the Princess Henry of Pless (known as 'Daisy') corroborates the description, as this Queen of Sheba sits on a stone platform and lounges back (as far as her tight corset allows her) on a lion skin. She holds a large ornamental fan behind her head and the vast length of her train, carried at the ball by four pages, disappears out of the frame. As indicated in another newspaper report (source unknown):

Princess Henry of Pless as the Queen of Sheba. A costume of gold and purple gauze, the short-waisted bodice encrusted with immense turquoises set round with diamonds and other precious stones; the skirt and draperies of gold gauze embroidered to correspond and the long girdle encrusted and fringed with jewels. Bird of paradise and crown. Four servants held her train (Murphy 1984).

LL-J

9 Gina Lollobrigida as the Queen of Sheba, 1959

Film still, 20.2 × 25.4 cm

United Artists Corporation Ltd

The British Museum, London, ANE Ephemera 127

In King Vidor's 1959 Hollywood film *Solomon and Sheba*, the Queen of Sheba – here played by Gina Lollobrigida – appears as the enemy of Solomon's throne, which is threatened in turn from within by the treasonous machinations of Solomon's brother, Adonijah (George Sanders). Determined to destroy Solomon (and his God) with her feminine wiles, Sheba seduces the king who begins to fall deeply in love with her. To demonstrate his devotion, Solomon initiates the worship of one of her pagan deities, Ragon, god of love, on Israelite soil which leads, inevitably, to civil strife. Solomon almost loses his throne and the support of his God, who with one well-aimed thunderbolt destroys Solomon's magnificent temple. But realising that she truly loves him, Sheba prays to Yahweh to relent from his anger and spare Solomon's life and throne. Having done so, she returns to Sheba as a convert to Judaism, carrying Solomon's child in her womb (Babington and Evans 1993, 67–9).

The costumes and sets are a classic Hollywood blend drawn from a wide range of sources. These included copies of Assyrian

wall reliefs in Solomon's palace and on the exterior of the ziggurat-like temple, and Persepolitan stairways at the entrance to the temple, whereas Solomon's grand throne itself was loosely based on that depicted in Poynter's painting of 1890. Whilst the metallic rosettes may be inspired by decorative interval motifs on the Assyrian gates from Balawat, the figures on the side of the bath pictured here are derived from sixth- to fifth-century-BC Persian representations on Achaemenid palace façades at Persepolis. Although southern Arabia was never part of the Persian Empire, in recent decades a small number of objects have been excavated in Yemen that illustrate the influence of Achaemenid art and design on the local industries (cats 132, 144). The representations that inspired this particular set design must have been well known to the Hollywood film-makers since the 1931–6 Oriental Institute Chicago excavations at Persepolis had been lavishly published shortly before (Schmidt 1953). Indeed, the 1959 press-books even advised cinemas to mount a bathtub scene in their lobbies: 'Here is a stunt which should attract much attention. In the picture Gina Lollobrigida takes a bath in asses' milk. Arrange for a local girl to sit in a warm bath of water coloured white by powder.'

LL-J





10

ANA MARIA PACHECO (B. 1943)

10 *Hairy Legs of the Queen of Sheba III, 2001*

Oil pastel on paper, 48 x 46 cm

Private collection, Brazil

Ana Maria Pacheco was born in Goiás, Brazil. In 1973 she was awarded a British Council Scholarship to the Slade School of Fine Art in London, and in 1985 she became the Head of Fine Art at the Norwich School of Art. In 1996 Pacheco was appointed the fourth associate artist at the National Gallery, London; she has held numerous

exhibitions of her sculptures, paintings and prints around the world; her most recent exhibition, entitled the *Dark Night of the Soul*, was held at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in the summer of 2001.

This is one of a series of works in which Pacheco explores the theme of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon. In this particular pastel, a black queen reveals her hairy legs as she steps into a pool of water. The scene is set in a lush garden, the Garden of Earthly Delights, and King Solomon bows in reverence to her. In the Jewish and Islamic traditions the hairy legs of the Queen of Sheba

symbolise gender reversal and unnatural forces, which ran counter to Solomon's power and control of the natural world. Order could only be restored by the marriage of the two rulers, or according to post-Qur'anic Muslim tradition, her marriage to a King of Yemen.

Pacheco was influenced by Christian, Muslim and Jewish traditions and was particularly interested in the theme of a powerful king hosting an equally powerful and proud queen, as well as the idea of the Queen of Sheba as an instrument to reassert the order of the universe ruled by man.

Amongst the various non-Biblical sources (in Jewish and Muslim folklore) there is a story which tells of the celebrated encounter. When Solomon was first told by a hoopoe that there was a rich and beautiful female ruler in a far-off land, he decided he must invite her to his court. Solomon's djinn denigrated the Queen of Sheba before her arrival, fearing that Solomon would be taken by the beauty of this foreign and dangerous woman. They claimed there was something wrong with her because of her dark ancestry, that she had hairy legs and the hooves of a donkey. To test the Queen of Sheba, King Solomon commanded the demons to build for him a court of glass, reinforcing the impression of a pond by filling the area underneath the glass with water and stocking it with live fish. Sheba believed this to be a real pond and lifted her skirt to reveal her beautiful feet and her hairy ankles.

Despite her wit, cunning and intelligence, Sheba had failed to recognise the artificial creation. Her days of ruling by defying the rules of nature were numbered. Solomon became concerned with 'the Queen's excessive hairiness' and insisted she must be shaved. She finally submitted and became a woman in a world ruled by man. 'Order was restored!' and Sheba returned defeated.

Legends of the Queen of Sheba

FABRIZIO A. PENNACCHIETTI



FIG. 6 *The Queen of Sheba before King Solomon*, oil on panel; sketch by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) made in preparation for a ceiling painting in the Jesuit church in his native city of Antwerp. (Courtauld Institute Gallery (Prince's Gate Collection), London)

The Queen of Sheba is the only female character in the Old Testament who has the privilege of being mentioned in the sacred writings of all three of the revealed religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, in the Bible (1 Kings 10:1–13 and 2 Chronicles 9:1–12), Gospels (Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31) and Qur'an (27:16–44), the queen is anonymous and there are no documentary clues to support her existence as a real historical person (fig. 6).¹

The first textual reference to the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1–13) links the fabulous figure of a woman with the equally fine figure of a man: on the one hand, the alluring female sovereign of a wealthy Arab kingdom; on the other, Solomon, the king to whom sacred history attributes the building of the first Temple of

the Most High in Jerusalem, and who in the collective imagination stands for the peak of the political glory of the people of Israel. Generally speaking, in the Old Testament the passage mentioned has special importance because it is the first written testimony of the esteem which Yemen enjoyed and the admiration it stirred from ancient times in Palestine. With caravans which travelled along what might be called the 'incense road', the enterprising South Arabian kingdoms were able to supply the markets of the eastern Mediterranean with spices, gold and precious stones (1 Kings 10:2); moreover, on Phoenician ships they procured valuable woods from Africa (1 Kings 10:11). The Biblical episode of the meeting between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, although marginal and secondary in the general economy of sacred history, nevertheless inspired the Fathers of the Church to edifying reflections and pious prognostications because it packed a powerful, evocative and symbolic punch. In Solomon they saw the prophetic anticipation of Jesus Christ; in the queen the symbol of the Church of pagan extraction.

The impact of this episode on European figurative art between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries was considerable. After the invention of the printing press, artists reinterpreted Biblical episodes, drawing directly on the sacred source and rejecting the mediation of popular tradition cultivated in the Middle Ages. The events of sacred history were revived as themes of a splendid profane art, losing in the process much of their primitive religious power. The favourite moment for depiction is the presentation of gifts by the queen within the magnificent framework of Solomon's palace (fig. 7).

Within the impressive setting of the palace the artist often gives prominence to the moment when the queen puts riddles to Solomon, to test his wisdom and knowledge. In this particular kind of depiction the verbal exchange, courteous and solemn, between the



FIG. 7 *King Solomon Receiving the Queen of Sheba*; bas-relief, gilt-bronze, 1425–52; detail from the doors known as the ‘Gates of Paradise’ by Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378–1455), the Baptistery of the Duomo, Florence. (*The Scala Group*)

two sovereigns seems to be accompanied by set gestures of the speakers’ hands, almost as if the position of the individual fingers was intended to transmit a special numerical meaning in relation to the single riddles to be solved (fig. 8). This calm gesturing is observed and commented on with astonished glances by the queen’s ladies-in-waiting, who are sometimes portrayed repeating the same sign as is being made by the king or by their own sovereign. This probably shows the technique of counting on fingers used in the Middle Ages before the introduction of Arabic numer-

als. The English language has preserved the memory of this technique in the word ‘digit’ (from the Latin *digitus*, ‘finger’) for ‘figure’ and by means of idioms such as ‘to have something at one’s finger tips’. The subject is captured on two oil paintings by Tintoretto (1518–94) and by Nicholas Knupfer (1603–55/60).²

THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT

There are three possible interpretations of the famous Old Testament story of the arrival of the Queen of Sheba at Solomon’s court. The first is that it may reflect

a historical event, to be linked with the movement of men, ideas and merchandise made possible down the centuries by the 'incense road' already mentioned. However, it has been shown that in Solomon's time, traditionally dated to the tenth century BC, commerce in incense and spices from southern Arabia had not yet begun and seems to date not earlier than the eighth

of Arabia, where it is lapped by a great ocean. It is well known that Yemen, in the different forms the word takes in Semitic languages, means 'south', or more precisely the southern part of the Arabian peninsula. More specifically Yemen means the right hand; i.e. the hand which, for someone facing towards the rising sun, indicates the southern aspect of a place. Moreover, the right side is traditionally linked to the concepts of 'fortunate', 'propitious' and 'fitting', thus explaining the expressions *Arabia Eudaemon* and *Arabia Felix* ('felicitous, happy Arabia') which the Greeks and Romans used to designate southern Arabia. Yemen as a metaphor for the extreme limit of the world is clearly present in the two Gospel passages (Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31) and in the passage from the Qur'ān (27:16–44) where the Queen of Sheba is spoken of. Both Luke and Matthew record that 'she came from the ends of the earth', offering the queen as an admirable example of determination in the search for salvation and for spiritual perfection. She had faced the dangers and discomforts of an arduous journey in order to hear the wisdom of Solomon. In the passage from the Qur'ān the vast distance separating Yemen from Jerusalem is alluded to through the mysterious figure of the messenger hoopoe. Like the miraculous wind which answers Solomon's command (Qur'ān 21:81; 34:12; 38:36), the hoopoe – which appears to be the talking manifestation of this wind – crosses Arabia in a flash from end to end.

A third and final possibility is that 1 Kings 10:1–13 may be a version of an ancient popular legend connected with the building of the first temple in Jerusalem which was theologically and ideologically expurgated in an attempt to suppress all memory of it. As 1 Kings 6:7 shows ('The building of the Temple was done with quarry-dressed stone; no sound of hammer or pick or any iron tool was to be heard in the Temple while it was being built'), the precept of the 'Law of the Covenant' (Exodus 20:25) according to which the altar could not be built of stone hewn with a metal blade, was interpreted so broadly as to cover the entire structure of the temple. The curious, unforeseeable detail of the Biblical text in which the building of a sacred edifice of great splendour and magnificence was to be carried out in complete silence and without using metal tools evidently fired the imagination of generations of believers. How did Solomon contrive to acquire the squared stones necessary for building without iron tools? We may reasonably suppose that this legitimate query gave rise to legends from Biblical times onwards but that these were committed to writing no earlier than the eleventh century AD, so that they seemed to be senseless medieval fancies.

One suggested explanation is that the Lord charged

century BC. Hence the historical existence of the Queen of Sheba is neither philologically nor archaeologically verifiable and such an uncritical use of the Old Testament as a historical source is no longer acceptable.³

An alternative hypothesis is that 1 Kings 10:1–13 may be a literary expedient to give further glory to the wisdom of Solomon and the prosperity of his reign, in addition to what had already been said in 1 Kings 5:1–14 (fig. 9). The ultimate purpose of the episode would be to stress the spread of Solomon's fame to the ends of the earth, and specifically to the farthest shores



FIG. 8 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*; champlevé-enamelled gold, 1181; detail from the altarpiece of Nicholas of Verdun, Klosterneuburg Monastery, Austria. (Photo: AKG/Erich Lessing)

the archangel Michael with the delivery to Solomon of a special seal in the form of a ring, which permitted him to employ as many devils as he wished for the construction of the temple according to the precept of the 'Law of the Covenant'. The association of the temple with devils and King Solomon's familiarity with beings from the occult world, expert builders though they might be, cannot have appealed to the writers of the Bible, and to the Jewish religious authorities in general. And since, as tradition relates, the Queen of Sheba personally saw the temple being built, and necessarily had dealings with the builder devils, it follows logically that the legend concerning her should be subject to severe censorship. In point of fact, the ancient legend regarding the Queen of Sheba, in the written form which emerged in the Middle Ages, was considered to be a late, bizarre popular invention.

Nevertheless, the legendary material which took form in the Middle Ages is beginning at last to be regarded as reliable, as a result of the patient gathering and shrewd combination of numerous clues, scattered across both historical works and canonical or apocryphal religious texts, as well as those in the form of tales told by Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem in the fourth century AD. The material in question was compiled by Jewish, Christian and Muslim writers such as the anonymous author of the *Targūm Shenī* on the Book of Esther, the early commentators on the Qur'ān, and men of Latin letters in the twelfth century AD, such as Peter Comestor and John Belet, or those in the thirteenth century AD, such as Jacopo da Varazze, the author of the *Legenda Aurea* or Golden Legend.

MUSLIM AND JEWISH TRADITIONS

The document whose dating and authoritative nature throws the greatest light on the origin and subsequent

evolution of the legend of the Queen of Sheba is the passage from the Qur'ān (27:16–44).⁵ This tale is at first glance baffling, when compared to the corresponding Biblical text, 1 Kings 10:1–13, yet it provides a valuable key to the possible reconstruction of the primitive content of the legend.

It should first be noted that in the time of Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam, the legend must already have been firmly rooted in the collective imagination of the Arab peoples, although most of them were still pagans. In any case many settlers in the Arabian peninsula, especially in Yemen, were Israelites, and in the northern fringes of the desert, in Syria and Mesopotamia, various nomadic tribes had embraced Christianity. Hence the Qur'ān has no need to expatiate on details, but simply describes the essence of the situation with flashes of allusion, bringing it to life in the hearers' minds. Far more space is dedicated in the same passage to eulogies and declarations of submission to the One God. From the first commentaries on the Qur'ān and from Jewish tradition, the plot may be reconstructed as follows.

Solomon, who loved banquets and feasts, one day presented an extraordinary spectacle to the kings of the Orient: a parade of devils, spirits and animals from heaven and earth. The only creature missing was the hoopoe, which arrived late, explaining by way of excuse that it had just discovered at the end of the earth a very wealthy country governed by a woman. The bird promised to bring her to Solomon's feet in chains, if the king wished. Solomon was delighted and gave the hoopoe a letter ordering the queen to come and pay him homage; otherwise the birds, spirits and demons would conquer her country at his command. In reply the queen sent a letter and costly gifts, and set out at once on the journey. When after seven years' travelling she reached Jerusalem, Solomon welcomed her in a pavilion with a glass floor (according to the Qur'ān) or at the royal baths (according to Jewish sources). This unusual welcome disconcerted the queen, who mistook the floor for an expanse of water; as she crossed the threshold she raised the hem of her dress just enough to prevent it from getting wet (fig. 10).

This momentary confusion on the part of the queen allowed Solomon to admire her legs, but also to realise that they were much too hairy. Disappointed, he provoked her with a far from courteous remark: 'Madam, your beauty is feminine, but the hair on your legs is masculine. Well, hairy legs are fine for a man but revolting on a woman'. The queen's pride was hurt, and she reacted by putting a long series of riddles to Solomon, only to discover to her astonishment that he was cleverer than she, for he solved them without

FIG. 9 *Cassone* depicting Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; wood, painted and gilded, c. 1450, Sienna. The erotic ambiguity of this meeting and offering of gifts made it a popular subject on dowry chests such as this.⁴ (*The Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. no. 7852-1862*)





FIG. 10 'Bilqis, seeing the fishes below the glass pavement, instinctively raises her skirts'; Sultan Husayn Mirza, *The Assembly of Lovers*, 1552. This Persian manuscript illustration was acquired by Sir Gore Ouseley. (Bodleian Library, Oxford; MS Ouseley Add24 Folio 1270)

difficulty. And so she praised and worshipped the One God, and after receiving all she most desired from Solomon she took her leave.

The whole narrative structure of the Islamic and Jewish versions of the legend of the Queen of Sheba turns in effect on the trick Solomon arranges to admire the queen's legs. There is one detail in the popular Islamic tradition which helps to explain this embarrassing fact: the queen, unnamed in the Qur'an, is universally known in the Muslim world by the name of Bilqis. This name, which to date has defied all attempts at etymological explanation, is seen in a new light if compared with Nikaule or Nikaulis, as the first-century AD author Josephus Flavius calls the

Queen of Sheba in his *Jewish Antiquities* (VIII, 2). This Greek name, too, is unrecorded elsewhere, but it might represent a reinterpretation of respectively *NQWLH and *NQWLYS. This is how one can reconstruct the rendering in Hebrew or Aramaic script of one of the nicknames the Greeks gave to Empusa, the female demon mentioned in Aristophanes' comedy *The Frogs* and famous for having the legs of a donkey. This nickname was Onokole or Onokolis, 'the donkey-legged woman'. In the light of this hypothesis the Arabic name Bilqis would be neither more nor less than a reinterpretation of *NQWLYS in a written form of Arabic which as yet lacked diacritics:

[Onokolis] *NQWLYS [Nikaulis] > *BQWLYS > *BQLYS > BLQYS [Bilqis]

One may wonder what this terrifying female demon had to do with the Queen of Sheba and Solomon, yet the *Testament of Solomon*, a Judaeo-Christian work dated between the first and third centuries AD, mentions this very Empusa in connection with our two distinguished personages. The name given to her in the *Testament* is not, it is true, either Empusa or Onokole/Onokolis, but 'Onoskelis'; but this is of very little account since this nickname too means 'donkey-legged woman'.

The same Judaeo-Christian text tells us that Onoskelis took an active part in the construction of the temple of Jerusalem by producing hempen ropes. We also know that Onoskelis had a very close relationship with Solomon. In fact when Solomon asked her which angel had the power to 'withhold' her, she answered that it was the king's own guardian angel. In Palestinian amulets of the Roman era Onokolis/Onoskelis is portrayed as a supine female devil pierced with a spear by Solomon himself depicted as a knight. This is actually the prototype of the iconography of St George and the dragon.

Thanks to Qur'anic exegetes we may solve the riddle of the singular relationship linking Onokolis with the Queen of Sheba: they have taken up the rumour which relates that the demons subjugated by Solomon believed that the lovely woman entering Jerusalem with her impressive train was not a human being, but a rival female devil. Fearing that the king might become infatuated with her and make her a present of the magic seal, thus making her forever mistress of their fate, they made him believe that under her clothes the queen was concealing the hooves of a donkey. In these circumstances it is understandable that the king should have prepared one of his most brilliant tricks to check the veracity of this suggestion: the illusion of the stretch of water in his baths or in the crystal floor of his palace.

Although Solomon had satisfied himself that the

FIG. 11 Illustration from *Chronique du regne de Menelik II* by Guebre Selassie, Paris, 1930.
First row: the Queen of Sheba sets off from Ethiopia to Jerusalem.
Second row: a banquet at Solomon's court with the queen looking down.
Third row: the king seizes the queen as she grasps a vase of water, breaking her vow that she would not take anything that belonged to him, and they sleep together. (*The British Library, London*)

queen was not a devil, but on the contrary a woman with the most beautiful legs, the malicious rumour nevertheless spread that she was excessively hairy and she was even unkindly labelled with the epithet of 'the donkey-legged woman' (Onokolis > Bilqis), which properly belonged to the female devil for whom she had been mistaken.

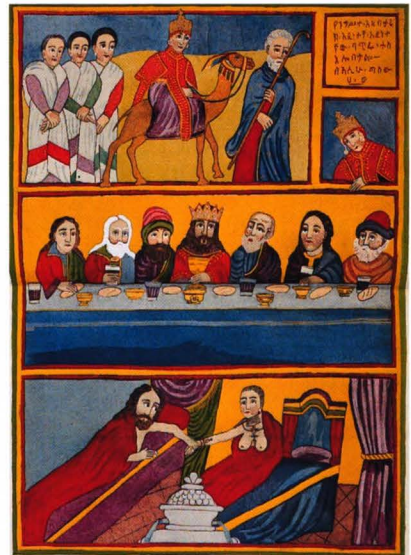
In Islamic art the first portrayals of the Queen of Sheba are Persian, from the Timurid period (1387–1468). She is often shown standing to the right of Solomon, who is seated on a throne supported by djinns and lions. Above the queen's head hovers the hoopoe, while behind her in obedient posture stand huge, monstrous devils.⁶

FROM 'LA REINE PÉDAUQUE' TO ETHIOPIAN QUEEN MOTHER

It was a natural development of the coupling in the popular imagination of the Queen of Sheba with Onokolis that the queen should have been described as having legs which were not only excessively hairy, but 'borrowed' from various members of the animal kingdom: donkey, goat or goose. The last of these attributions is the origin of the so-called 'reine Pédauque' (Queen Splayfoot) of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century paintings in central European countries, in which the Queen of Sheba is shown with the webbed feet of a goose as she crosses the stream separating her from Solomon.⁷

The Queen of Sheba has a goat's leg in a Coptic tale, in which the encounter with Solomon is ingeniously, and with absolute originality, inserted in the narrative cycle known as the *Story of the Wood of the Cross* which can be summarised as follows. When it was planned to build the temple in Jerusalem Solomon ordered the stone-breakers to use a huge tree trunk which had been miraculously brought from the Garden of Eden itself. It was sufficient simply to touch the rocky mass with the trunk and it obligingly fell into squares of the required size. Meanwhile, Solomon had been told that the Queen of Sheba had one monstrous leg like the hoof of a goat. So the king had the whole esplanade of the temple flooded, and after putting his throne in a dry spot he waited for the queen to dismount and walk barefoot across the sacred esplanade. Thus the queen was unable to conceal her goatish leg but, as she waded through the water, she was touched by the mysterious tree trunk, which had floated up to the surface. This touch produced a miracle: the goat's hoof was turned into a human leg, as lovely as the other. When the esplanade was drained, the miraculous trunk was placed in the temple.

This Christian version from Egypt is typologically anterior to the well-known Ethiopian variant of the



legend of the Queen of Sheba which forms the nucleus and the opening of the 'Glory of the Kings' (*Käbra Nagäst*), an early fourteenth-century work which Ethiopians today regard as the fundamental cornerstone of their national identity. Here the tale has been stripped of all that is wonderful and fantastic, even to the riddles: its favourite theme instead is the seduction of the Queen of Sheba by Solomon (fig. 11). On her journey home she is delivered of a child named Menelik, destined to be the founder of the Solomonic dynasty; the last representative of this dynasty was Emperor Haile Selassie (1892–1975). This story continues to have very wide popular appeal within Ethiopia, exemplified by paintings and even coffee packaging, which find a place in the tourist market (see cat. 12).

THE STORY OF THE WOOD OF THE CROSS

The original development of the legend of the Queen of Sheba in Western Christendom, and its insertion as an integral part of the *Story of the Wood of the Cross*, can be correctly understood only if we bear in mind that as early as the first century AD, if not earlier, some people in Palestine called the queen by the personal name of Saba, the Greek rendering of the Hebrew Sheba (see Psalm 72:10). This is documented on the one hand by the apocryphal *Testament of Solomon*, where she is called 'Saba the queen of the South', and on the other, albeit indirectly, by the Gospels of Matthew (12:42) and Luke (11:31), which refer to her

simply as 'Queen of the South'. It is probable that in Jesus's native region she was called Saba. Clearly, when the place name Saba was transformed into a personal name, the traditional denomination of her kingdom would be replaced by the more generic term 'the South', or Yemen.

It is a natural consequence of the introduction of the name of Saba that, in Christian circles of classical Graeco-Latin culture, an association should have been established through assonance between the new personal name and Sabbe or Sambethe, the so-called *Sibylla Hebraea*, who was supposed to have foretold the coming of Jesus Christ. Thus in Christian versions the step was taken towards the assumption by the Queen of Sheba of the prophetic role typical of a sibyl, that is to say an inspired pagan woman who foretells the crucial moments of Christ's life on earth. In the Byzantine tradition, but not exclusively, the Queen of Sheba is actually renamed 'Sibyl'.⁸

As was only to be expected, this new function of the queen's led to the abandonment of all the fabulous aspects of the primitive legend, including the riddles used to test the wisdom of Solomon. Here and there in

from the first centuries of the Christian era. In the vast range of events narrated in the *Story of the Wood of the Cross* Solomon's meeting with the Queen of Sheba is re-established as a self-contained episode, the best description of which is that of Jacopo da Varazze, in the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea*. Briefly, the story as he tells it is this.

When the Queen of Sheba arrived in Jerusalem, she hastened to Solomon's palace. On the way she had to cross a stretch of water, from bank to bank of which a cedar trunk had been laid as an improvised bridge: this huge tree would otherwise have found no other employment. It had been cut down shortly before by order of King Solomon, and for all the carpenter's care in cutting it to the right length it was always either too long or too short for his purpose. This was the tree Seth had planted on the grave of his father Adam.

When she found herself before this uncooperative length of wood the queen was moved by an impulse to kneel down and worship it. An inner voice told her that on that very tree the saviour of the world would hang. After wading across the water she told the king



FIG. 12. *The Reception of the Queen of Sheba by King Solomon* from the *Legend of the True Cross* cycle, c. 1452-7; fresco by Piero della Francesca, San Francesco, Arezzo, Italy. (Bridgeman Art Library)

the West too, however, as the figure of the 'reine Pédauque' shows, specific references emerged to the hidden monstrosities of her body, and to her supposed contacts with devils.

The second step taken in the Graeco-Latin Christian world was the grafting of the legend of the Queen of Sheba onto the narrative fabric of the *Story of the Wood of the Cross*, a cycle of legends which likewise refers back to apocryphal and parabiblical works

of this prophecy and Solomon had it removed to the most unexpected place: he had it buried at the bottom of the stream. Shortly before the Passion of Christ, the tree emerged unexpectedly from the bottom of this stream, which had meanwhile become the Sheep Pool. Seeing it floating there and thinking that it would make a suitable upright for a cross, the High Priest's servants pulled it out of the water and delivered it to their master.

This was the final stage in the development of the legend of the Queen of Sheba in Western Christendom. Later, as the medieval world merged into the Renaissance, it was given artistic interpretation by such important figures as Agnolo Gaddi (c. 1345–96) with the frescoes on the walls of the apse of Santa Croce in Florence (1394); his pupil and imitator, Cenni di Francesco Cenni (fl. 1410–15), with his frescoes in the Oratory of the Compagnia della Croce di Giorno adjoining the church of San Francis in Volterra (1410); and the most brilliant of them all, Piero della Francesca (1419/21–92), on the walls of the apse of the church of St Francis in Arezzo, painted in 1452–9 (fig. 12).

MEETING SOLOMON IN JERUSALEM: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SHEEP POOL

In all the variations of the legend of the Queen of Sheba, with the exception of the Biblical texts (1 Kings 10:1–13, 2 Chronicles 9:1–12, Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31), there constantly recurs the theme of a real or supposed expanse of water between the queen and Solomon when they first come face to face. It is probable that archaeologists have identified the physical spot at which popular Jewish tradition – despite the censorship of religious authorities, reflected in the Biblical texts – imagines their encounter.

North of the esplanade of the Temple in Jerusalem, on the right as one emerges from the Crusaders' church of St Anne and opposite the imposing dam separating the two large basins of the so-called Sheep Pool or Probatica, lies an archaeological site which has been defined as a Jewish therapeutic sanctuary. Judging from the coins and ceramics found during the work, it was functioning from the time of the Maccabees. Today it consists of a vast, deep reservoir, flanked by basins hewn from underground rock for ritual bathing, with steps leading into them, and by underground rooms. These rooms belonged to the pagan phase (second–third centuries AD) of the sanctuary, when it was linked to the healing god Asclepius or Serapis, and were probably set

aside for the divinatory practice of incubation, allowing the patient to sleep in the sanctuary with a view to receiving, in dreams, revelations about their state of health. From Jerome we learn that the hydrotherapy centre was frequented by foolish women, driven by superstition or by their yearning for fertility. Finally the anonymous pilgrim from Bordeaux who visited Jerusalem in AD 333–4 tells us that on this site was the cave where Solomon had tormented the devils in order to subjugate them and to entrust to them the building of the temple.

Thus it may be deduced that Solomon, held by an enduring popular tradition to be capable of dominating the dark powers of evil, was recognised as patron of therapeutic and ritual religious practices. Because he was able to neutralise the malign powers of the devils, always considered the cause of the gravest illnesses, he was thought of as the healer *par excellence*, as Asclepius or Serapis was for the pagans.

With the establishment of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Jerusalem following the Edict of Milan (AD 313) and the building of the Holy Sepulchre by Constantine (d. 337), the practices linked to the cult of Solomon were no longer tolerated. By the time the pilgrim Etheria visited Jerusalem about the year 383 the therapeutic sanctuary had been closed, and King Solomon's ring, previously kept there, had been transferred to safekeeping inside the complex of the Holy Sepulchre. In the fifth century AD the entire area was occupied by the foundations of the Church of the Paralytic, since it was there that Christian tradition set the miracle performed by Jesus as narrated in John 5:1–18. This is the only passage in the Holy Scriptures which makes allusion to the existence in Jerusalem of a sanctuary where hydrotherapeutic treatment was offered.

There was however no place in all Jerusalem which was more suitable as the setting for the fabled encounter of the Queen of Sheba with Solomon than the so-called Sheep Pool and the accompanying Solomonian sanctuary. This had already been depicted by artists as celebrated as Piero della Francesca.



11

11 The Queen of Sheba (Bilqīs) and the hoopoe, Solomon's messenger, c. 1590–1600

Iran, Safavid, Qazvin

Tinted drawing on paper, 9.9 × 19.2 cm

False signature of Bihzad

The British Museum, London, OA 1948-12-11,8

Bequeathed by Sir Bernard Eckstein

Jewish influence in Arabia was considerable when Islam was founded in the seventh century AD, and many Old Testament stories and their Jewish elaborations were incorporated into the Qur'ān (Watt 1974, 85). This drawing depicts an important moment in the Qur'ānic tradition (27:15–44) when the hoopoe delivers a letter from Solomon to the Queen of Sheba. In the Qur'ān Solomon is regarded as not only a great and wealthy king with power over birds, animals and djinn, but also a prophet of God. Believing that the queen worshipped the sun instead of God, Solomon wrote to the Queen, 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; do not act proudly against me, but come to me in humble submission' (27:30–31). The queen responded with a letter and gifts and set off to visit Solomon in his crystal palace.

In this drawing Bilqīs, as the Queen of Sheba is known in Islam, reclines beside a

stream while gazing at the hoopoe perched, rolled letter in its beak, on the tree stump at the right. Clothed in a remarkable robe covered in an inhabited arabesque or 'waq-waq' design, Bilqīs with her sinuous form echoes the meander of the stream next to her. Although the attribution to Sadiqi Beg, superintendant of Shah 'Abbas's library, is not firm (Stchoukine 1964, 77, pl. XXVII), the style of the drawing certainly resembles that of the artists working at the Safavid court in the 1590s. Despite its narrative theme, the drawing was intended for inclusion in an album, not as a manuscript illustration (Martin 1912, vol. II, 7, pl. 119; Marteau and Vever 1913, vol. II, no. 208; Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray 1933, no. 156; Gray 1952; Titley 1977, no. 395/223; Rogers 1983, no. 55). SRC

12 An Ethiopian Painting of the Sheba-Solomon Narrative, 20th century

Signed 'Tsehai' (surname unknown)

Oil on canvas, 32.5 × 60 cm

Private collection, UK

Acquired in Addis Ababa, April 2000

The story of the Queen of Sheba has long been important to the national and religious

identity of Ethiopia, particularly the northern Christian highlands. Although many components of the Sheba-Solomon narrative are found in the so-called *Targum Sheni* to the Book of Esther and the Qur'ān, the basic elements of the most well-known Ethiopian version were transcribed in the *Käbra Nagäst*, or 'Glory of the Kings', which was written in the early fourteenth century AD and is attributed to Yeshaq of Aksum. The *Käbra Nagäst* was created to provide legitimacy to the recently established Solomonic dynasty, led by Yekunno Amlak (r. 1270–85); and since then, it has often been used for similar purposes. According to the *Käbra Nagäst*, the Queen of Sheba, known as Makeda, once ruled over Ethiopia's northern highlands. After visiting King Solomon in Jerusalem, she gave birth to their son Menelik in her capital city Aksum. Menelik inherited her kingdom after a visit to his father, from which he returned with the Ark of the Covenant. Over centuries, the narrative has been modified; numerous oral and written versions have emerged. But it is only in the last century that painted representations of the narrative have appeared; and the story of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon is now arguably the most common theme in Ethiopian popular painting.



12

Ethiopia has a long history of artistic achievement; but until the early nineteenth century, most paintings were produced for religious or royal patrons and focused on religious themes. The first documented acquisition by a foreigner of a 'secular' painting was around 1814. After Emperor Menelik II (1844–1913) founded Addis Ababa in the late 1880s, the production of paintings, both religious and secular, grew as fast as the expatriate community that was fuelling the demand. The introduction of the narrative in painted form most likely occurred at this time. Emperors Menelik II and Haile Selassie (1892–1975) placed significant emphasis on the *Käbra Nagäst*, even so far as to claim direct descent from King Solomon, which was enshrined in Article 2 of the revised (1955) constitution of Ethiopia; and either artists or their customers must have seen the narrative's potential as a subject of artistic interpretation. So strong was the demand for popular paintings that artistic workshops were established to produce them in assembly-line fashion – a practice which continues to this day.

The first artists to produce secular paintings were church painters. The ubiquitous 'comic-strip' format of Sheba-Solomon paintings may have evolved from their practice of

using borders to demarcate scenes within religious artwork. Scenes in early paintings of the narrative, like the images found in churches, were often contained within irregular borders. Recent Sheba-Solomon paintings, however, are formatted in rows and columns of uniform squares or rectangles; this practice can be seen here. Although artists usually illustrate the narrative in this serial format, single-scene representations are also produced. Ethiopian artists often include captions in their work and write proper names in red ink, especially in religious works and Sheba-Solomon paintings. Yet in this painting the artist only uses black-ink Amharic captions along with twenty-one painted images in three rows of seven scenes each. The first row illustrates a preface to the narrative not found in the *Käbra Nagäst*. In row one Makeda's father is crowned king after using a poisoned goat to kill a python that had been terrorising the people. He dies and she weeps bare-breasted over his body, a *jäbäna*, or coffee pot, resting in the foreground. In the seventh scene she is crowned queen. Row two begins with the queen's messenger travelling by boat to Jerusalem with a flask of perfume for the king. Makeda follows and arrives at Solomon's palace. They feast using a *mäsob*, the traditional food container of the northern

highlands. Makeda and Solomon are then shown in bed. The queen and her entourage sail home. Makeda's cloak is closed, an artistic convention that may represent her pregnant state. In the final scene in row two the queen and her maidservant give birth to sons, both of whom were fathered by Solomon. In this painting the maidservant's conjugal relationship with him is, unusually, not depicted. Row three begins with the boys playing *gänna*, a game similar to field hockey. In the following scenes the half-brothers travel to Jerusalem, and Menelik meets his father. He is next shown presenting his mother with the Ark of the Covenant. Intervening scenes that illustrate his schooling and acquisition of the Ark are not depicted, although they usually appear in paintings with more than twenty-one scenes. Makeda abdicates in favour of her son and then dies. Menelik erects a *hawlt*, or monument, in her honour and perhaps as a grave marker. In this concluding scene the *hawlt* quite clearly represents another image of highland culture, the stelae of Aksum. For those who believe in the historicity of the Queen of Sheba, it is to Aksum and these stelae that they look, believing her to be, as depicted in the painting, at rest beneath one of them (Pankhurst 1966; McCall 1969; Ullendorf 1974; Fábó Perczel 1978).

LN

LAMBERT SUSTRIS (c. 1515/20–70)

13 *The Queen of Sheba before King Solomon*, c. 1550–70

Oil on canvas, 80 × 187.3 cm

National Gallery, London, NG 3107

Bequeathed by Sir Austen Henry Layard in 1916

Lambert Sustris trained in Amsterdam and is recorded in Rome in the mid-1530s. He is said to have worked for Titian (1485/8–1576), which would have been in the late 1530s. In the following decade he was active in Padua and frescoed some of the rooms in the Villa Luvigliana nearby. He seems to have accompanied Titian to the Imperial Diet in 1548, and his only signed painting, *The Baptism of Christ*, was painted for the Cardinal of Augsburg (Musée des Beaux

force. The fictive architecture at the Villa Luvigliana is similarly learned and reflects a close study of Baldassare Peruzzi's (1481–1536) work in Rome. Here the architecture may owe something to Peruzzi's *Presentation of the Virgin* in S. Maria della Pace, and there is certainly a debt to an engraving of this subject by Marcantonio Raimondi (see cat. 18) or one of his followers which may be after a design by Peruzzi. The actions of the porters, the group gathered at the column and the gesture of the queen all seem to be developed from this source. It is striking that Sustris arrived in Venice at about the same date as the publication of the *Treatise on Architecture* by Peruzzi's pupil Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554). He, just as much as Serlio, may be responsible for the adoption

The painting has a double resonance as it was once in the collection of the archaeologist Sir Austen Henry Layard. Unrecorded before it was found in the hands of a Madrid dealer in 1872, the painting was at first attributed to Bonifazio de' Pitati by Layard's friend Morelli who supposed, understandably, that it was an unfinished work rather than one in which the colour is unusually faded and transparent. Other artists' names have been mentioned (Andrea Schiavone, Paris Bordone, Christoph Schwarz), but Peltzer correctly identified Sustris as the artist and this attribution, after it had been published by Bernard Berenson, has met with general support, although Cecil Gould in his catalogue merely conceded that Sustris was the 'least improbable' candidate. In fact



13

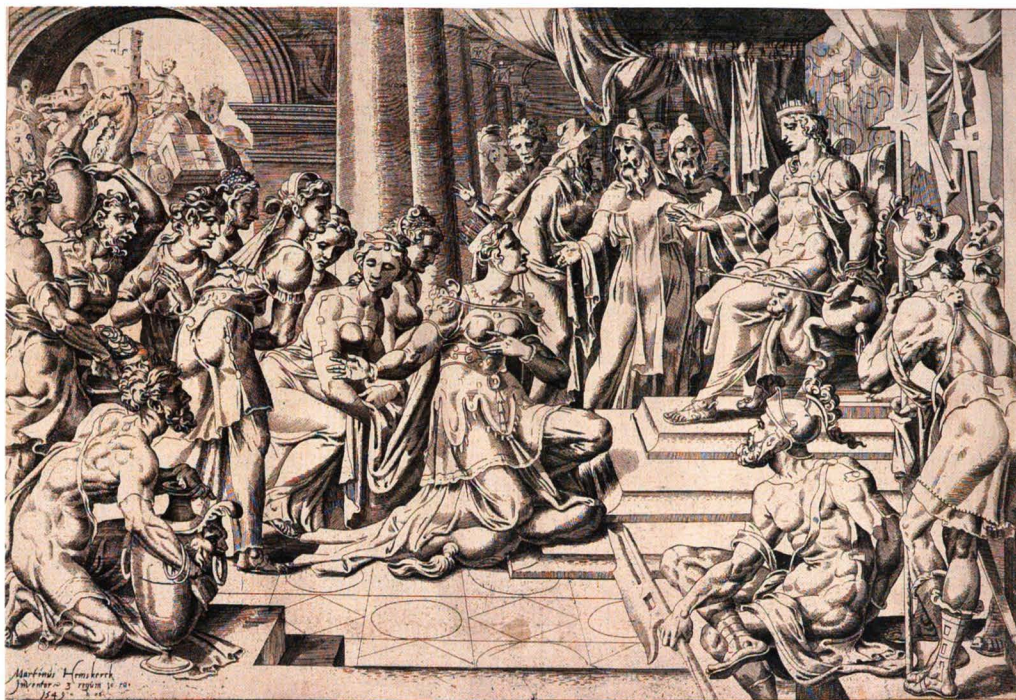
Arts, Caen). Several portraits of German sitters dating from the early 1550s have been convincingly attributed to him and a group of gallery pictures with religious and classical subjects and landscape settings are clearly by the same artist as the Caen Baptism. His painting is thin and soft, his figures light with a somewhat enervated grace, his colours a 'pale imitation' (Sir Charles Eastlake's phrase) of his Venetian contemporaries.

The Queen of Sheba is notable among Sustris's work for its demonstration of his knowledge of classical architecture, all of which, as can be clearly seen, was painted previous to the figures. The drawing of the Corinthian temple portico, six columns across and six columns deep, is a tour de

of this style of architecture by Titian in his *Presentation of the Virgin* for the Scuola della Carità.

The painting is likely, given its format, to have been painted for the wainscot or furniture of a bedchamber or perhaps for the case of an organ. Design for a specific location would explain the lighting from the right and the movement of figures from the right (features which would be surprising in an independent easel picture). There may have been a pendant painting with figures processing from the left – possible subjects would be Esther before Ahasuerus (Artaxerxes) or the Adoration of the Kings (used as pendants for paintings of Sheba by Tintoretto and Bonifazio de' Pitati respectively).

the fluent figure groups, the elegant if limp drapery, the palette of pale blue, rose, grey and yellow, the dense sculptural ornament in the architecture, and even the pattern of the paving and veining of the marble connect the picture conclusively not only to other small narratives by Sustris but also to his portraits and the Luvigliana frescoes. NP



DIRCK VOLKERTSZ COORNHERT (1522–90)
AFTER MARTEN VAN HEEMSKERCK (1498–1574)

14 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, 1549*

Etching, 25.8 × 38 cm
New Hollstein 116

The British Museum, London, PD 1869-4-10,132
Purchased from Colnaghi, London

Coornhert became the principal engraver of Heemskerck's work from about 1548 to 1558. He was also well known as a poet and theologian and worked with Heemskerck on the selection and design of subjects for dissemination as prints. Heemskerck was a central figure in the graphic art of sixteenth-century Netherlands, for although he never executed a single print, he was responsible for the design of nearly 600. Biblical subjects form the bulk of Heemskerck's output and the fame of his work ensured that publication of editions continued until the eighteenth century. Most of his prints were published in series, and the present example

is unusual in that it was evidently intended to stand alone.

Heemskerck's style is mannerist in the exaggeration of anatomical forms revealed through clinging garments. The design is based upon a series of intersecting diagonals focusing the viewer's gaze on the figure of Sheba kneeling at the exact centre of the composition. She displays an overt erotic charge, her armoured bodice accentuating her breasts and waist. The group of camels with their elongated necks pouring through the arch indicate her Arabian origin. The print operates on a visual level alone, lacking the usual quotation interpreting the subject. The scene has been exploited less to depict the encounter of two biblical characters than to celebrate the exotic opulence of the Queen of Sheba and her Eastern companions. This image may be seen as the beginning of a continuum culminating centuries later in Sir Edward John Poynter's grand Orientalist works (see cat. 1) (Luijten ed. 1993/4, 107, no. 116; Veldman 1977, 55–7).

IVANOVICH FEDOR (1765–1832)
AFTER LORENZO GHIRBERTI (1378–1455)

15 *The Queen of Sheba before King Solomon, c. 1798*

Pen and black ink over graphite with brown wash,
51.7 × 52.2 cm

The British Museum, London, PD 1854-2-11,82
Purchased from Dr Granville

Ghiberti stands at the forefront of the artistic and intellectual revolution of the Italian Renaissance. *The Queen of Sheba before King Solomon* is one of ten panels of his masterpiece, the doors known as the 'Gates of Paradise', which were designed c. 1425–52 for the Baptistry of the Duomo in Florence (see fig. 7). The panels are based on episodes from the Old Testament. Ghiberti achieved a remarkable perspective by modelling the foreground almost in the round while treating the background elements in the shallowest of relief. The panels were cast in bronze and gilded to create a shimmering effect. The monumental architecture is a

curious hybrid of Classical and Gothic styles. The stillness and the symmetry of the composition create a sense of utmost solemnity. The meeting is presented with a strong intent of purpose: Sheba has come to test Solomon 'with hard questions' (1 Kings 10:1). Her crown is hidden from his gaze and she is presented as a veiled Madonna-like figure.

Fedor came from the Russian-Chinese

border but based himself in Karlsruhe in Germany and travelled widely, visiting Greece, Italy and England. He established a reputation for his drawings and prints after sculpture, especially the antique; Lord Elgin employed him to produce drawings of sculpture from the Parthenon. In about 1798 a set of etchings was published after the Gates of Paradise and the present drawing – slightly less than life-size – is the design for one of

these. Fedor has imitated Ghiberti's contrasts of shallow and high relief, applying brown washes to indicate the deep shadows around the principal figures while drawing the architecture in line only. Early Renaissance art had fallen out of fashion by the eighteenth century and this publication is an example of the renewed interest that was to develop to a huge extent in the following decades (Thieme 1915; Ray 1980; Pacciani 1980).

DE



WENCESLAUS HOLLAR (1607–77)
AFTER HANS HOLBEIN II (1497/8–1543)

16 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, 1642*

Etching, 25.1 × 18.7 cm

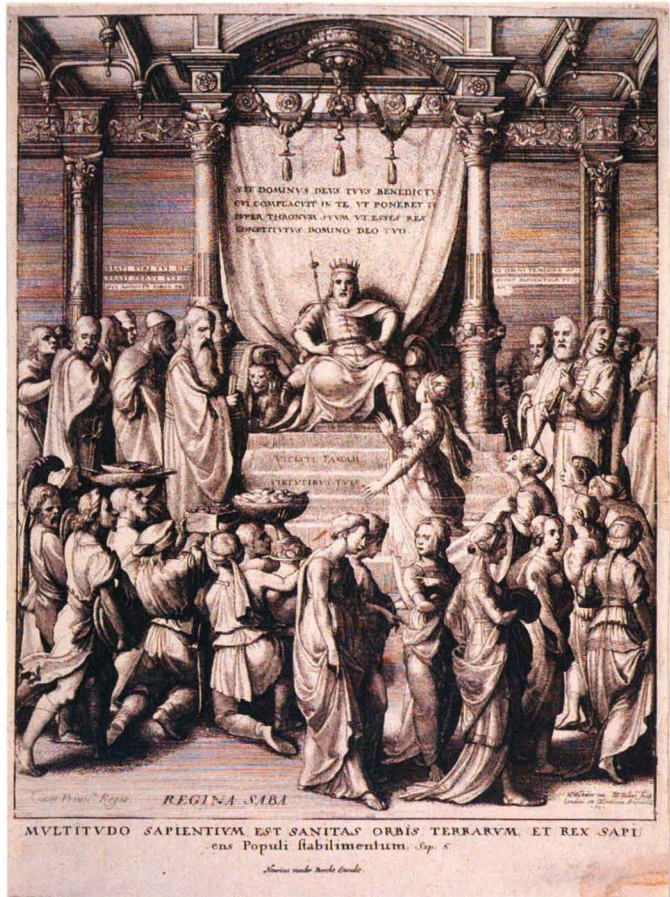
Pennington 74, third and published state

The British Museum, London, PD 1875-7-10,598

Purchased from Mr Bihn

Hollar's etching is based on a miniature by Holbein now in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle (RL 12188, 22.7 × 18.3 cm). It was an unusual departure for an artist whose only other work in miniature is portraiture. The execution is exquisite, with silverpoint underdrawing, watercolour washes and gold heightening. The etching after the miniature is equally delicate. Hollar has employed a variety of techniques from cross-hatching and parallel lines to stippling in order to model forms and textures. In addition, the plate has been bitten to different depths allowing subtleties of line and tone. It is one of a number of etchings after works of art in the collection of Thomas Howard, the Earl of Arundel (1585–1646), in whose service Hollar was employed. Arundel was a noted collector of Holbein's work and the print would have served as a fine advertisement of his refined taste.

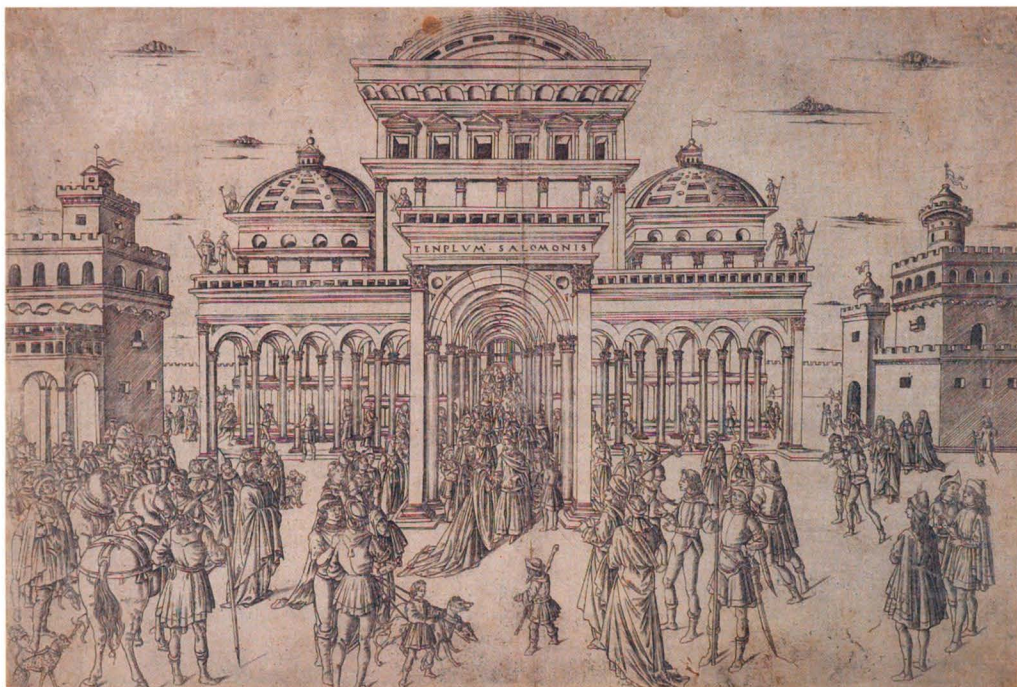
The figure of King Solomon clearly resembles King Henry VIII (1491–1547), in whose court Holbein was employed, and the work may have been intended as a gift. It is believed to be the first occasion that Solomon was given a contemporary likeness (The Queen's Gallery 1978, 129–30, no. 88). In contrast to earlier depictions, particularly that by Ghiberti (see fig. 7 and cat. 15), the Queen of Sheba is given a cold reception by Solomon who makes the merest gesture of welcome. The depiction communicates an image of kingship which cannot be questioned. The quotation from the Apocryphal Book of the Wisdom of Solomon (6:24) reinforces this iconography: 'But the multitude of the wise is the



16

welfare of the world; and a wise king is the upholding of the people' (Pennington 1982, xxiv–xxv, 9, no. 74; Griffiths 1998, 94–5, no. 51; Rowlands 1985, 91–3, 150, M1).

DE



17

ATTRIBUTED TO FRANCESCO ROSSELLI
(1448–AFTER 1508)

17 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, c. 1470–90

Engraving, 29.4 × 43.2 cm

Hind (1938) B.III.4, second and final state

The British Museum, London, PD 1845-8-25,477

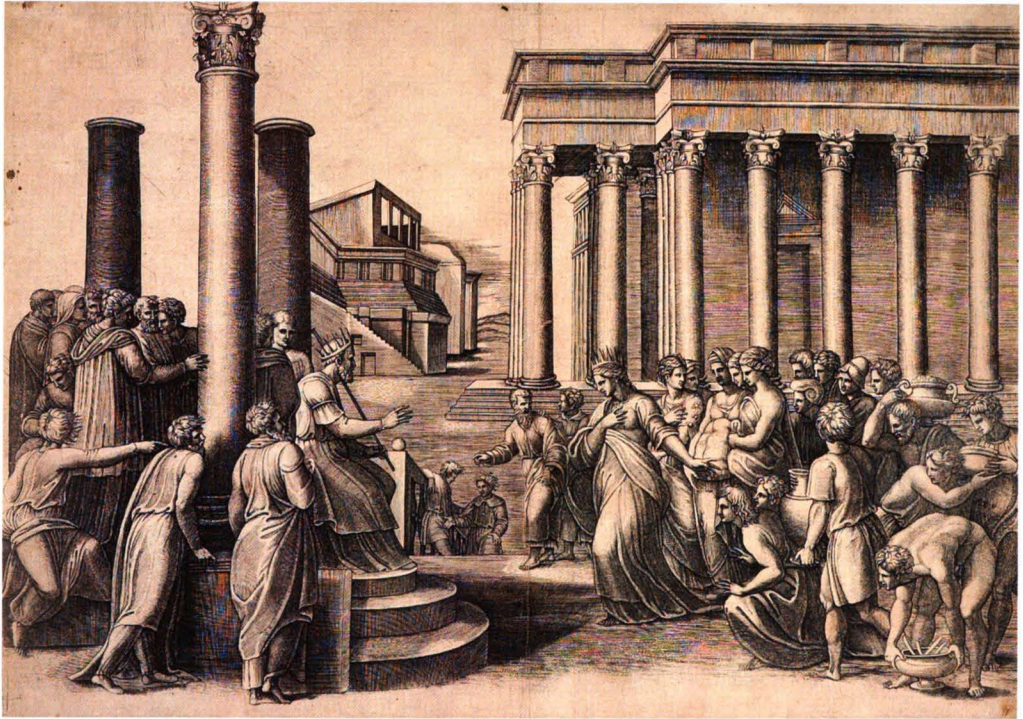
Purchased from William and George Smith, London

Rosselli's print is the earliest surviving engraving of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon's court. Its authorship has only recently been assigned to Rosselli by comparison of technique and iconography with other securely attributed work. The entire scene is

one of supreme elegance redolent of contemporary Renaissance Florence. Sheba sports the fashions of courtly attire; her hair is carefully braided and her dress has elongated sleeves. The introduction of a camel and several leopards provides an undercurrent of exoticism. The image echoes Ghiberti's treatment of the subject some twenty years before, which the engraver would certainly have known first hand in his native Florence (see fig. 7 and cat. 15). Both Rosselli and Ghiberti direct the viewer's gaze beyond the two main protagonists to the lavish architecture of Solomon's palace. Rosselli's figures are dwarfed by an expansive classical complex composed of a

multistoreyed block, flanked by two domed wings supported by an elegant colonnade. Despite the rigid composition, there is the minimum of formality as Solomon welcomes his royal visitor. Sheba's entourage is small, her gifts modest and onlookers chat casually. A painted *casone* panel by an anonymous Florentine painter of approximately the same date now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (fig. 9), shares a number of pictorial elements with this print and may have been based on it (Hind 1938, 137–8, no. B.III.4 (as anonymous); Levenson *et al.* 1973, 47–59; Zucker 1994, 4–5, 79, no. 063).

DE



18

MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI (c. 1470/82–1527/34)
AFTER RAPHAEL (1483–1520)

18 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, c. 1520–25

Engraving, 40.2 × 56.5 cm

Bartsch XIV.13.13

The British Museum, London, PD 1874-8-8-227

Purchased from the 5th Earl of Wicklow

Raphael was the first painter fully to realise the commercial and artistic benefits that prints after his work could have. His collaboration with the engraver Marcantonio Raimondi revolutionised print production. The wide currency that prints enjoyed stimulated Raphael to produce several designs

specifically to be engraved. The precise model of *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba* is unclear but the strong association of Raphael with Marcantonio's work has meant that the attribution of the design has traditionally been given to Raphael. However, no preliminary drawing for this print survives.

Raphael had treated the subject of the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in his celebrated series of biblical frescoes of about 1518 in the Vatican Loggia. The print incorporates some elements derived from the fresco including a pointing figure and stooping gift-bearers, but marked differences, not least the change in format, makes it unlikely that this print depends on

a Raphael design. The incoherence of certain elements, particularly the architecture, would point to this print being largely the design of Marcantonio himself.

The courtly grandeur of the print had much influence upon later depictions of the subject. Both Eustache Le Sueur (cat. 19) and Sir Edward John Poynter (cat. 1) display a clear debt to it in one way or another, but whereas Le Sueur simply borrows figural elements, Poynter adopted the print's dramatic impact and its stage-like setting (Bartsch 1813, 13–14, no. 13; Shoemaker and Brown 1981, 168–70, no. 54; Dacos 1977, 83–90, 108–9, 202; Oberhuber and Guann 1999, 77, no. 14).

DE



19

EUSTACHE LE SUEUR (1616–55)

19 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, 1650

Oil on canvas, 92.7 × 114.9 cm

Barber Institute of Fine Arts,
University of Birmingham, 58.7

One of the twelve founding members of the French Royal Academy of painting and sculpture in 1648, Le Sueur was among the leading classical masters of his day and based his mature style on the art of Raphael and Nicolas Poussin (1593–1665).

Painted in 1650 as an overmantel for the Hôtel de Tonnay-Charente in Paris, this austere painting depicts the familiar scene of the Queen of Sheba visiting King Solomon. She is accompanied by two female attendants

and three servants bearing gifts. At the right the crowned king descends to greet her. In keeping with the Biblical account, Le Sueur depicts six steps, flanked by statues of lions, leading up to Solomon's throne.

The composition is based, in reverse, on the engraving after Raphael of the same subject by Marcantonio Raimondi (cat. 18). Le Sueur has greatly reduced the number of figures and sets them in a more plausible architectural setting, which appears to be the interior of Solomon's temple. Though three compositional drawings survive for the painting – two of which are squared for transfer – Le Sueur made extensive changes to it as he proceeded, the majority of which are visible to the naked eye. Solomon's profile was altered and the lions added over the

steps, as were the base and column at the right. In addition, the female attendant immediately behind the Queen of Sheba originally had her head turned, as she does in the engraving after Raphael. Prominently visible beneath her profile is the headband she wore in this earlier pose.

The painting was engraved by Gabriel Smith (1724–83) and published in London by the enterprising John Boydell (1719–1804) in 1767, when it was in the collection of the Duke of Devonshire. This was part of Boydell's lucrative project to reproduce celebrated paintings in British collections (Mériot 1987, 51, 60, 74, 80, 96, 252–4, no. 111; Musée de Grenoble 2000, 115, no. 32; Clayton 1997, 177–80).

RV



20

ATTRIBUTED TO GIUSEPPE PIAMONTINI (1664–1742)
AFTER RAPHAEL (1483–1520)

20 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, c. 1700–18

Cast bronze, 25.7 × 36.5 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, A.32-1959

Presented by the John Webb Trust

This bronze plaque translates into low relief a painted decorative scheme illustrating episodes from the Bible, commissioned in about 1518 for the Vatican Loggia. Raphael's scheme was not easy to see but prints made after them enabled his designs to become familiar throughout Europe. Their impact upon later biblical depictions was profound and Raphael's designs served as direct models for work in a variety of media such as tapestries, ceramics, paintings and sculpture.

Raphael's composition makes great play with the drapery; the viewer's attention is prevented from focusing on a particular aspect of the scene by the undulating forms. Sheba's animated drapery, caught in mid-action as she steps up towards Solomon, is unusually spirited. The one significant change to Raphael's fresco is that Solomon and Sheba embrace with both arms; in the original, Sheba motions with an outstretched right arm to the gifts brought by her attendants.

The presence of the lettering 'MAX. SOLDANUS.[ICT].1710' on this plaque, and

its companion *The Finding of Moses* (also after Raphael's fresco in the Loggia), led to their attribution to the Florentine sculptor Massimiliano Soldani Benzi (1658–1740). The crudely cut letters (as though an afterthought or falsification) and the treatment of the drapery has recently led to this attribution being abandoned in favour of one to Giuseppe Piamontini, a Florentine pupil of the Baroque sculptors, Giovanni Battista Foggini (1652–1725) and Ercole Ferrata (1610–86). Piamontini produced a range of work including tomb sculpture, large statues of saints and portrait busts, but small-scale reliefs such as this one, intended for purely decorative purposes, form the bulk of his surviving work (Pope-Hennessy 1964, 590, no. 629; Montagu 1974; Dacos 1977, 83–90, 108–9, 202).

DE

PIERRE REYMOND (c. 1513–84)

21 *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, c. 1560

(Not illustrated)

Limoges, France

Signed 'P.R.'

Enamel on copper, painted in grisaille with flesh tints and gilding, D 20.3 cm

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 2034-1855

Bought from the sale of the collection of the antiquary, Ralph Bernal (Christie's, 20 March 1855, lot 1490)

This plate is adapted from a woodcut designed by Bernard Salomon (c. 1508–61) from the Lyons Bible of 1554. According to 3 Kings 10 (known now as 1 Kings 10 in Protestant Bibles), the Queen of Sheba decided to travel to Jerusalem to prove to herself that the reports of Solomon's wisdom and wealth were true. She brought with her magnificent presents of spices, much gold and jewels. Though the camels bearing these gifts are depicted in the background of the original woodcut, they are absent here. In the print Solomon's hand is raised in blessing, whereas here it is extended in welcome. The figure by the column on the far right differs from that on the engraving which is more akin to the version of the figure on a signed tazza sold in the Mentmore sale (Sotheby's, 20 May 1977, vol. II, lot 1125). Parts of this scene are also comparable with a plate in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (R272) which shows King Josias from 3 Kings 22.

The plate rim is decorated with grotesques, cartouches and a tablet bearing the Biblical reference 'JH. ROIS. X'. A band of gilt guilloché surrounds the central scene. The reverse of the plate bears in the centre the bust of a woman with curly hair and a hat, turning slightly to her left. This is surrounded by a band of egg-and-dart and, outside that, bunches of fruit and winged cherub faces between strapwork. Between that and the foliate border on the rim is a ring of gilt leaves. The artist has made much use of raised white enamel of varying thickness on both sides to attain gradations in tone, and has also employed enlavage extensively (scratching through the enamel before firing to achieve shaded and hatched areas).

Pierre Reymond came from an old-established metalworking and enamelling family of Limoges. He is also known to have designed stained glass and some silver. His workshop was the busiest of all the enamelling enterprises of the region. His earliest works were polychrome enamels in the 1530s, but he soon concentrated entirely on grisaille work on plaques, decorative plates as here, and useful vessels. As business grew, he increasingly left members of his workshop to make further copies of his work, while continuing to create the most lucrative commissioned work himself. By the 1570s he was again producing some polychrome enamels.

JC

22 Embroidered panel

England

Second half of 17th century

Plain weave cellulose ground fabric, silk satin appliqué, feathers, glass beads, hair, wrapped and coiled metal threads, mica, parchment, pearls, silk, wire, 31.2 × 46.8 cm (irregular)

Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1994.142

Presented by C.M.D. Parker, 1994

This embroidery is typical of the work undertaken by young girls of the period as part of their education. They appear to have selected from a range of printed images of biblical, classical or allegorical sources. Although similar depictions of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba occur on other embroideries, for example that in the Burrell Collection, Glasgow (29/66), no source for this version has yet been identified. However, the king and queen are customarily shown in a hilly landscape alive with vividly worked flowers, animals and birds. These draw on a variety of printed sources such as *A Book of Flowers, Beasts, Birds and Fruits* published by the London print seller Peter Stent in about 1665.

Such subjects also offered the embroiderer an opportunity to depict lavish clothes and use a rich variety of techniques and materials. Here the background is in flat stitches such as tent and rococo stitch, enlivened by raised areas. The mermaid's torso and the faces of the four figures are made from appliqué silk satin, padded from the back, in a highly sculptural technique which is sometimes described as 'stumpwork', a late nineteenth-century term. Their hands are worked in long and short stitch. On the reverse of these areas there are small support patches, two of which have part of an ink drawing of a mermaid. Solomon, the queen and her maid all wear collars and cuffs of needlepoint lace, made separately and then applied. The complexity and patterns subtly vary to reflect their different social status. The exotic bird is made in a similar technique using small sections of needlepoint; some are padded to form the body while the wings are created from numerous small pieces to give the effect of feathers. Some of the flowers were made in the same way. The embroiderer used a wide variety of luxurious materials, including different types of silk and metal thread. Many of the silk threads are faded, and areas which are now beige were once a strong salmon-pink. Tightly



22

spun silk threads wrapped around with a fine metal wire were used to depict the rocks, while the water gushing out from the decorated parchment pipe is another use of wrapped metal thread. Other materials used include hair couched over a coiled silk wrapped metal thread for the hair of the main figures. The remains of feathers are visible on some of the caterpillars and butterflies. Small pearls decorate the monarchs' crowns, the maids' headdress and their garments as well as the queen's gifts and Solomon's elaborate tent and carpet. The animals' eyes are glass beads while the mermaid's are mirror and the castle windows are made of mica, a transparent mineral.

The Old Testament image may be read on many different levels in relation to the contemporary religious and political context. The image of Solomon as a wise and prosperous ruler is one with which many rulers wished to associate themselves. Holbein's 1535 drawing of Solomon clearly identifies him with Henry VIII (see cat. 16). James I and IV held a masque of Solomon during the visit of the King of Denmark. Sheba's visit could also be interpreted as prefiguring the Adoration of the Magi or the relationship of the Church with Christ. This latter interpretation linked the story to the concept of an ideal marriage, coupling wisdom and wealth. The embroidery could thus carry ideas related to the monarchy, religious

values or a personal experience such as a betrothal. However, caution must be exercised in 'reading' the picture in a too literal sense. The mermaid, animals and flowers suggest that this is a compendium of images which may combine political, religious or moral reflections with the sheer enjoyment of an exuberant embroidery technique executed with great skill and aplomb. MB

23 Silver pair-cased verge watch

Geneva

Mid-18th century

Outer case: D 5.15 cm, TH 2.73 cm including glass;
inner case: D 4.36 cm; movement: 3.5 cm,
between plates 0.67 cm

The British Museum, London,
MME 1958-12-1,382 = CAI.382

Formerly part of the Herbert Elkington Collection,
purchased by Courtenay Adrian Ilbert in 1933.
Illustrated and described in Herbert Elkington's
personal catalogue, *Illustrated Description of Watches
and Various Timekeepers collected by H.F. Elkington*,
(1914), p. 46 (now in the Horological Study Room,
The British Museum)

Ilbert Collection, purchased in 1958

A silver pair-cased verge watch with a plain silver inner case numbered 5719, with the maker's mark 'EC' incuse with a coronet above. There is also a very small maker's mark or import mark 'ET' in a rectangular cameo deeply punched into the case back and the pendant. The cast and repoussé outer case depicting King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba is signed on a reserve 'D. Cochin' although the name is now badly rubbed and indistinct. Inside the outer case is a hand-coloured print depicting a young woman wearing a white blouse and pink dress with blue waistband and holding up a bird in a cage. A piece of red velvet is used as a lining. White enamel dial with an arcaded minute circle numbered 5-60 and hours 1-XII. Beetle and poker hands, the gold hour hand is not original.

The gilded fusee movement has circular gilded-brass plates and four square baluster pillars. It has a verge escapement controlled by a brass three-arm balance and spiral balance spring with a geared regulator, the silver index engraved 1-4. The balance bridge is pierced and engraved with foliate scrolls.

The movement is signed on the back plate 'John Wilter London n° 5719'. The name John Wilter is an interesting one and is thought to be one of a series of fictitious names used by Geneva watchmakers, either for the supply of illegal second-quality goods for retail in London by well-known London watchmakers, or for sale in Europe generally



23

where, at the time, the word 'London' on a watch would add kudos. For many years these watches were called 'Dutch Forgeries' as the arcaded minute dials, popular in The Netherlands at the time, were thought to be a clue regarding their origin. However, it is now known that they originated in Switzerland, and specifically in Geneva. Daniel Cochin (fl. 1732-70) began his career as a master engraver in Geneva in 1732 and seems to have specialised in the decoration of

watch cases and boxes. A method particularly associated with him is the production of silver decorative cases using casting methods in imitation of the more common and demanding repoussé technique. Here a master-model is prepared and used to make any number of cast copies. In contrast to the hand-raised individual pieces produced using the repoussé technique, this method makes it possible to produce more pieces at lower cost.

DT

Saba' and the Sabaeans

CHRISTIAN ROBIN

The name of Saba' enjoys remarkable fame; in countries of Judaeo-Christian or Muslim culture there is an immediate association with an exotic and mysterious queen, evoked both in the Bible and the Qur'ān. Saba' is not a mythical location, as a kingdom with this name really did exist in ancient Yemen (fig. 13). The present exhibition offers the opportunity to put forward what is known about this mysterious kingdom and to consider the reasons for its fame.

THE REDISCOVERY OF HISTORICAL SABA'

Thousands of texts inscribed on stone or wood or cast in bronze and discovered at archaeological sites throughout Yemen indicate that ancient South Arabia was divided into a number of kingdoms. Saba' was the most important of these. European scholars derived the terms 'Sabaeen' and 'Sabaeans' from the name Saba', to describe the language and the inhabitants of the kingdom.¹

At the heart of the Sabaeen territory was the Wādī Dhana, a watercourse that flows from the Yemeni highlands towards the desert interior where it vanishes into the sands of the Ramlat as-Sab'atayn. Mārib was the capital of this kingdom and was situated at the precise point where the wādī emerges from the mountains, a location which was particularly favourable for developing oasis agriculture. Each spring and summer, torrential rains over the mountains filled the wādīs with run-off water. The torrent slowed after emerging from the mountains and could, with a certain amount of organisation, be directed into irrigation channels. The soil was easily prepared for the cultivation of crops, as it was relatively flat and lacked natural vegetation because of the dry climate. The territory of Saba' initially comprised the region of Mārib but during the reign of the most famous ruler, Karib'il Watār, son of Dhamar'ali, or 'Karib'il the Great' (c. 700–680 BC), the territory was expanded to include a large part of south-

west Arabia. Later, the territory was restricted to the regions of Mārib and Ṣana'a', the secondary capital founded in the first century AD.

The kingdom of Saba' existed from the beginning of South Arabian civilisation: the oldest stone inscriptions, which date to the eighth century BC, already refer to it in the form of royal titles such as the '*mukarrib* of Saba', hence this period is also known as the '*mukarrib* period'. The title '*mukarrib*' or 'federator' was more prestigious than that of 'king' and seems to have been reserved for sovereigns who exercised a certain hegemony over other tribes or kingdoms; the term continued to be used until the beginning of the first century AD. These first texts were very short and commemorated the dedication of religious offerings or the building of walls or other constructions, whereas earlier inscriptions are limited to single words incised or painted on pottery which were apparently used to identify the contents, the owners or the destinations and reveal at best very little about tribal affiliations or dialect.

Thus what is known about the history of the kingdom of Saba' is based on the archaeological remains and thousands of inscriptions which date from between the eighth century BC and AD 275, the latter being the approximate date when Saba' was annexed by its neighbouring kingdom Ḥimyar. There are two sorts of inscriptions. The first type are primarily carefully executed texts, indelibly inscribed in stone or cast in bronze, which were designed to be on public display. The overwhelming majority of these texts commemorate the performance of rituals (to remind the deities about the merits of the donor; see cat. 206) and the realisation of works (to establish property rights; see cat. 120); several outline particular laws, rules or bans. The second type comprises texts in cursive script, incised on wooden sticks or palm branches and primarily used to record correspondence and personal contracts (see cat. 205). The use of language, the particular gods that are invoked, the tribes and

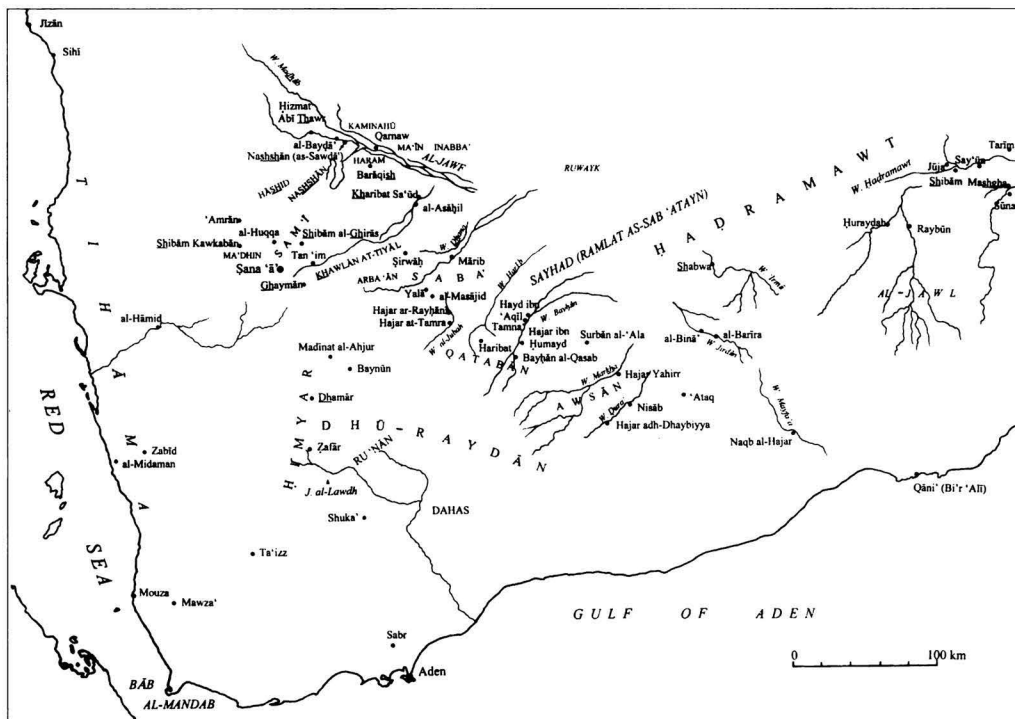


FIG. 13 Map of ancient southern Arabia. (Drawn by A. Searight)

locations that are mentioned, the rituals and the calendar of events identify a Sabaean text. However, the language itself is not sufficient to establish whether a South Arabian inscription is Sabaean as the kingdom of Ḥimyar also used this language between 110 BC and AD 570.

These local sources are complemented by a few references to Saba' in the Bible and in Assyrian documents and more substantial texts about Arabia by certain Classical authors. Used together, these allow a reconstruction of the outline of the history of Saba' which can be divided into two broad periods.² The first period – the 'mukarribate' – lasted from the eighth to the first centuries BC and was dominated by a caravan economy with links to the markets of the Near East, mostly at Khindanu on the Middle Euphrates (ninth to eighth centuries BC), later at Gaza during the Persian period, and then finally at Petra during the Hellenistic period. Saba' was a theocratic monarchy held together by the common cult of the god 'Almaqah who was offered special tribute during a pilgrimage in July. The Sabaeans also venerated four other deities: the gods 'Athtar and Hawbas and the goddesses dhāt-Ḥimyam

and dhāt-Ba'danum. Important resources were derived from aromatics gathered in the deserts of southern Arabia, such as frankincense, which was largely grown in the Ḥadramawt, and myrrh, as well as valuable commodities from India and Africa, such as ivory, tortoiseshell and precious woods, for which Saba' acted as the intermediary in the overland trade.

The chronology of this period is still under discussion. Many South Arabian inscriptions cannot be closely dated as they mention people whose identities are obscure or they fail to cite any externally datable events. In addition, although many sovereigns are known, their relative and absolute chronology still remains elusive. This is largely because it is difficult to distinguish a *mukarrib* or king by his homonyms. Until around the end of the first century AD, all the Sabaean rulers bore titles consisting of a name followed by an epithet, each chosen from six and four possible alternatives. The names included Dhamar'ali, Karib'il, Sumhū'alay, Yada'il, Yakrubmalik and Yitha'amar and the epithets included Bayān, Dharih, Watār and Yanūf. Furthermore, the archaeological chronology is also uncertain, as the dates mostly rest on stylistic analysis



TOP FIG. 14 View of Mārib. (Photo: A. Porter/AFSM)

ABOVE FIG. 15 Aerial view of the Awwām temple or Maḥram Bilqis, Mārib. (Photo: A. Porter/AFSM)

archaeologists (1971–). The Americans and Italians excavated the first archaeological soundings; large-scale excavations which took place at Mārib and Širwāḥ were commenced in the 1980s by the German Archaeological Institute in Ṣanaʿāʾ (DAI).¹¹

THE EVIDENCE FOR SABAʾ

The archaeological remains at Mārib, which is first called Maryab in the inscriptions and was only known as Mārib from the end of the second century AD,

Širwāḥ and in the Jawf are very important in the understanding of the Sabaeen kingdom. Mārib was by far the largest ancient city in southern Arabia – indeed, possibly the only real city – with a stone enclosure wall that contained an area of some 110–20 hectares (fig. 14).¹² Outside the perimeter of the city were two gardens, an irrigation system including the enormous Mārib dam, sluices and canals, and two temples dedicated to the Sabaeen national deity ʿAlmaqah (fig. 15). Many other structures are mentioned in the inscriptions, such as the royal palace of Sabaʾ and a sixth-century church, but these have not yet been discovered.

The most famous monument at Mārib is undoubtedly the great dam on the Wādī Dhana, 7 km upstream from the city (fig. 16). This construction made it possible to irrigate up to 10,000 hectares. In its final stage, which dated to the fifth to sixth century AD, this dam consisted of a thick mudbrick retaining wall measuring 650 m long and 15 m high with two stone sluices anchored in the bedrock on the north and south banks. The inscriptions dating between the mid-fourth century AD and AD 558 mention a series of four repairs to the dam which was finally destroyed between 558 and the death of Muḥammad in AD 632 according to the Qurʾān (34: 15/16). Mārib had played a central role in the history of southern Arabia for as long as the Sabaeen kingdom remained



ABOVE FIG. 16 View of the dam, Mārib.
(Photo: St J. Simpson)

RIGHT FIG. 17
Calcite-alabaster
inscription,
As-Sawda', Aranyada'
temple, early
7th century BC
(cat. 27).



independent, which was until around AD 275. The city then came under Ḥimyarite control and rapidly declined. The pagan temples were abandoned in the third quarter of the fourth century, when the Ḥimyarite dynasty converted to Judaism.

The most spectacular monument at the walled city of Ṣirwāḥ, 35 km west of Mārib, is a temple dedicated to "Almaqah master of the Ibex". The temple enclosure wall is semi-oval in plan and is almost entirely intact. Long inscriptions describing the achievements of Karib'il the Great (or Karib'il Watār, son of Dhamar'alī) were discovered inside the temple which has now been excavated by the German Archaeological Institute (fig. 17). Some 8 km north-east of Ṣirwāḥ are the calcite-alabaster mines of al-Makhdara where huge quantities of rock have been quarried from the mountain.

In the Jawf – a vast tectonic fault to the west-north-west of Mārib – a number of towns were Sabaeen throughout all or most of their history. These are characterised by their remarkable enclosure walls and extramural temples. The enclosed areas are relatively modest and measure some 15 hectares at the most. A sanctuary site consisting of several religious complexes lies in the foothills and slopes of Jabal al-Lawdh and marks the northern limit of the Sabaeen territory during the late period.

The highlands around Ṣana'a' were Sabaeen from their origin but the regions have very few remains because, as they have always been occupied, the ancient structures have been destroyed through reuse of building materials. The principal Sabaeen monument in Ṣana'a' was the Ghumdān palace, the earliest reference to which dates to the beginning of the third century AD. The number of floors, the richness of its decoration and the clepsydra (waterclock) were celebrated by the poets.¹³



FIG. 18 The stela of Abraha. (*The National Museum, Ṣana'a'*)

Foremost among the palaces of Yemen and having the most remarkable history and the most widespread reputation is Ghumdān . . . Ghumdān was twenty storeys high, one on top of the other. . . . At each of the palace's four corners stood a copper statue of a lion. These were hollow so that whenever the wind blew through them a voice similar to the actual roaring of lions would be heard (al-Hamdāni 8.5, 15, 22–5).

Ghumdān, probably situated north of the Grand Mosque, was destroyed under the caliph 'Uthmān (AD 644–56).

THE SABAEN MODEL

Saba' occupied a special place in South Arabian civilisation. Sabaeen remains are without doubt more numerous and of a better quality relative to those of other kingdoms, but this is not the only reason for the kingdom's fame. A number of factors underline the important role that Saba' played. The first clue is that the most ancient South Arabian inscriptions come from Mārib or sites in the surrounding area. The second indication rests in the fact that the Sabaeen onomastics were used throughout southern Arabia. Sabaeen was the only language used in southern Arabian nomenclature, particularly in the case of personal names including a possessive pronoun or a factitive verb, which are grammatical forms that are presented differently in Sabaeen compared to Minaean, Qatabanian or Hadrami, the other main South Arabian languages. A third clue is found in the language of the most ancient inscriptions from Qatabān and the Ḥaḍramawt which use verbal and pronominal forms borrowed from Sabaeen inscriptions, indicating that Sabaeen served as the basis for the formulation of these documents.

Saba' not only acted as the model for writing, nomenclature and language but the kingdom also strongly influenced the architecture of the entire region. The same architectural forms are found throughout South Arabia: palaces, city enclosure walls and private houses of a certain date only present very minor variations in appearance and structure, and polygonal columns, square capitals with denticular and incised decoration and marginally drafted and pecked limestone masonry were popular everywhere. The iconographic and decorative repertoire also provides a good example of Sabaeen influence: the same motifs of the ibex, crescent moon and star, and dentils were widely used.

There is no doubt that the ancient South Arabians, as well as the first Abyssinian kingdoms, considered Saba' to be the birthplace of South Arabian civilisation. The name of Saba' was a source of legitimacy and prestige. There is a perfect example from Ḥimyarite history of

the esteem in which Saba' was held. When Ḥimyar first separated from Qatabān in c. 110 BC, the tribe rejected Qatabanian and adopted the Sabaeen language (which was different to Ḥimyarite); still more astonishing was the fact that the kings of Ḥimyar placed Saba' at the beginning of their royal titles, before dhū-Raydān, the dynastic palace of the Ḥimyarites. The last Ḥimyarite kings, who ruled in the fifth and sixth centuries AD, did their utmost to preserve the city of Mārib, the capital of Saba', from decline and abandonment by maintaining the great dam and the irrigation network, despite terrific difficulty, revolt and disease, as recorded on the stela of Abraha (fig. 18).¹⁴ Neighbouring Arab tribes from the desert also held Saba' in the same regard.

Having discussed the evidence for a Sabaeen origin of South Arabian civilisation, it is important to consider how cultural unification came about in ancient southern Arabia. Initially there was a tension between the diverse political, social, cultural and linguistic systems on the one hand and an imitation of the Sabaeen model on the other, whereas the earliest South Arabian inscriptions demonstrate that there were a number of South Arabian states of greatly varying size, with their own institutions, divine panthea, calendars and individual languages. Nevertheless, unity could be seen through some shared traits, such as the use of the same script, iconography and architectural styles as well as the same typology and phraseology for similar inscriptions.

Between the eighth century BC and the beginning of the Common Era, the South Arabian kingdoms were inclined to affirm their own particular idiosyncrasies. Qatabān, for example, developed an original type of elegantly styled calcite-alabaster statuary. With the emergence of Ḥimyar (c. 110 BC), followed by the disappearance of the kingdoms of Ma'in (around the end of the first century BC) and Qatabān (c. AD 175), this tendency was radically reversed and South Arabia began to unify. The principal reason for this change was the rise to power of Ḥimyar, which annexed vast territories and unified the whole of South Arabia in c. AD 290. Political unity was accompanied by the use of a single calendar and administrative language, henceforth Sabaeen. As it was extremely difficult to cultivate a common faith on the remains of paganism, the Ḥimyarite dynasty chose a new religion; the kings as individuals adopted Judaism and chose a more toned-down version of monotheism for the state religion in the years following AD 384. Greater contacts with the outer world resulted in the rapid increase in Hellenistic-Roman influence in art and architecture, which also acted to unify the region culturally.

At the same time, the individual became as important as the clan or tribe, a fact witnessed by the increasingly personal contents of the dedicatory

inscriptions. In the political domain the nature of power was radically modified. The South Arabian kingdoms in the ancient period based their collective identity on their allegiance to a great deity and in the practice of communal rituals. After the ascendancy of Ḥimyar, the cement that bound the political entities was no longer the sharing of a small number of religious practices but the allegiance to a prince. The perception of time was even modified and a new linear system was slowly imposed, beginning with the appearance of three eras with the years counted from a chosen point in time.

By the fifth century AD the Yemen had every sign of a true nation with a strong central power, a unified language (Sabaeen) and writing system (South Arabian), a common artistic expression and a dominant religion (Judaism, largely practised by the ruling classes), after some 1,400 years of historical development. The political unification and cultural homogeneity under the Ḥimyarites was without doubt not as deep rooted as the ruling classes would have wished, as was generally the case in the empires of Late Antiquity. Failure began to loom large on the horizon. An ecological crisis devastated the irrigation agriculture on the plain. In order to involve Ḥimyar in its war against the Persians, Byzantium encouraged proselytising Christians, who managed to divide the country and provoke a victorious military intervention from Abyssinia in c. AD 525–30. These wars and the great epidemic of the years AD 547–8 decimated the Ḥimyarite population. The Ḥimyarites, having liberated themselves from the Abyssinians only to fall under the control of the Sasanian Empire in c. AD 570, found their kingdom divided into small principalities. The collapse of the Ḥimyar regime had significant consequences: without it the foundation, by Muḥammad of the first Islamic State at al-Madina in AD 622, would not have been possible.

THE ORIGINS OF SABA'

As previously discussed, Saba' seems to have been the birthplace of the South Arabian civilisation, but this is not to say that the Sabaeen architectural style, writing and iconographic repertoire were developed in cultural isolation. Saba' was partly indebted to its Egyptian and Near Eastern neighbours for its inspiration. There is no doubt, for instance, that South Arabian writing was derived from the consonant-based writing of the Near East, of which proto-Sinaitic and Ugaritic are two different examples. The carving and working of stone was doubtless influenced by techniques developed in Egypt.

The methods of cultural and technological transfer that operated from the Near East towards the southern

Arabian peninsula are not well known. Long-distance commercial exchange probably developed from a very early date. The first products that were exchanged were metals, precious stones and all sorts of rare commodities including aromatic gums and resins, which the Egyptians (from the third millennium BC) and then the Near Easterners and Greeks (from the first centuries of the first millennium BC) used in cultic and funerary rituals, perfumes and pharmaceuticals. The commerce was initially a 'down-the-line' system, without the producers or consumers ever meeting, but very quickly the lure of profit would have brought certain enterprising individuals into direct contact. The use of the camel as a beast of burden, from the beginning of the first millennium BC, would have permitted the regular transport of aromatic products from southern Arabia to the Near East. Perhaps the earliest mention of the Sabaeans and long-distance camel caravan trade in historical texts may be dated to the middle of the eighth century BC. This Assyrian text describes the seizure of a caravan by the governor of Sukhu and Mari near the city of Khindanu on the middle Euphrates. The caravan was accompanied by 100 people from Tayma' (located in north-west Arabia) and Saba' and consisted of 200 camels carrying myrrh, wool, iron, alabaster and blue- or purple-dyed cloth. The caravan was apprehended for the non-payment of tolls as they travelled homeward. The text lists some of the commodities which may have been traded in exchange for southern Arabian products.¹⁵

This document as well as other Assyrian texts from the same period and the references to Saba' in the Bible, show that an important trade network developed under Sabaeans control. This trade certainly put Sabaeans merchants in contact with the people of the Near East and they doubtless became the means by which cultural and technological influences spread from the north to the south. The first use of the camel as a beast of burden and the appearance of writing and monumental stone buildings in southern Arabia are loosely synchronised, but that is not to say that Saba' suddenly appeared in the eighth century BC. The kingdom had a long evolution; irrigation agriculture may have been practised as early as the third millennium BC in the oasis of Mārib.

The prestige of Saba' in South Arabia was no doubt linked to its central role in the beginning of South Arabian civilisation. It was also the result of the political supremacy that Saba' achieved towards the end of the eighth century BC. The prime mover in the increase of Sabaeans power was the previously mentioned *mukarrib* Karib'il the Great. In eight military campaigns, Karib'il the Great not only annihilated the rival kingdom of Awsān but also successfully conquered the whole of western Yemen and imposed his supremacy

over the remaining independent kingdoms, notably Qatabān and the Ḥaḍramawt. An offering made in his name in Mesopotamia permits the dating of his reign to the end of the eighth and the beginning of the seventh century BC.¹⁶

The exploits of Karib'il the Great are known, thanks to a detailed account of his reign engraved on two superimposed 7-m long limestone blocks. The inscriptions were carved towards the end of his life and were placed in the centre of the sanctuary at Ṣirwāḥ.¹⁷ After Karib'il Saba' maintained its hegemony for more than a century, until the emergence of the Qatabanian power.

THE PARADOX OF THE FAME OF SABA'

Curiously, the fame of Saba' was never based on the reasons discussed above but instead on fables and stories. Saba' gradually became known through Greek and Roman authors, who referred to the southern half of the Arabian Peninsula as 'happy Arabia' (see p. 33). These authors circulated extravagant tales about the prosperity and luxurious lifestyle of the South Arabians. The poet Horace echoed this idyllic image: '... with desire today for the fortunate treasures of the Arabs, you prepare a harsh campaign against the kings of the Sabaeans land, still ignorant of defeat'.¹⁸

The fame of Saba' was mostly derived from the Bible. According to the First Book of Kings (10:1-13) an anonymous Queen of Saba' arrived in Jerusalem to visit King Solomon, who is traditionally dated to the tenth century BC.¹⁹ Having heard about the fame of Solomon, the queen wanted to confirm for herself whether the king was as wise and his kingdom as flourishing as was rumoured. The biblical author reported that the queen arrived with a very great camel caravan laden with quantities of aromatics, 120 talents of gold and precious stones, and left enlightened. This story was intended to give the reign of King Solomon the aura of a golden age, a propaganda tool that was used with considerable success. The story lent itself particularly well to anecdotal expansion and permitted the Abyssinians to establish a link with the kingdom of Israel.

The story of the Queen of Saba' is also recounted in the Qur'ān. Curiously enough, this rendition depends entirely on the biblical story and Jewish amplifications and does not contain any additional information drawn from local Arab sources. The Arab Islamic traditions which relate to pre-Islamic Arabia confirm that from the beginning of Islam, the memory of Saba' was almost completely erased. It only took a few decades for the people of southern Arabia to forget what the title 'King of Saba' signified, a title which had been used by the Abyssinian kings of Yemen as late as the year 560.

24 Bronze statue of Ma'dikarib

Mārib, Awwām temple

Possibly 6th century BC

H 93 cm, W at shoulders 27 cm, H of head 15 cm

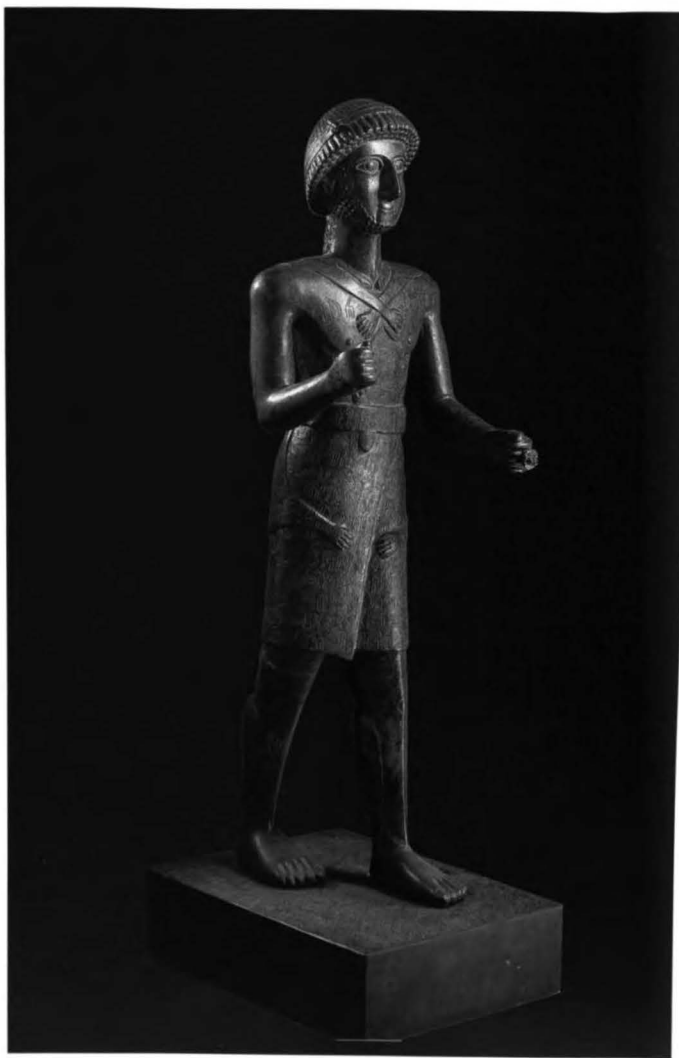
The National Museum, Şana'a, YM 262

The Awwām temple was one of the earliest temples, and by far the largest, in South Arabia. The temple was located in the southern oasis at Mārib, 3.5 km from the ancient city and capital of the Sabaean kingdom. The main sections of the temple complex included a huge oval precinct wall, a peristyle entry hall fronted by eight monolithic pillars, a mausoleum abutting the exterior of the oval wall, and a cemetery about 100 m south-west of the temple (see fig. 15). The temple was dedicated to 'Almaqah, the national deity of the Sabaeans.

Over 420 fragments of statues and statuettes were found during the excavations directed by Wendell Phillips, founder of the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM), at the Awwām temple at Mārib between November 1951 and February 1952. This was the largest and best preserved of the statues but it has provoked a number of different interpretations. It consists of a walking male figure dressed in a short kilt made from a single piece of cloth wrapped around and held in place with a plain broad belt, through which is thrust a straight dagger with a riveted hilt. The figure wears a lion skin draped over his back with the paws crossed at the front.

The enigmatic smile, headdress and posture of this bearded figure, who presumably held a staff or spear in his hand, has been variously compared with Cypriot and Greek statues of the seventh to the fourth centuries BC, and Phoenician statues of the second quarter of the first century BC (Albright 1952, 38). The lion skin is reminiscent of statues of the Phoenician god Ba'al Melqart from the seventh century BC and depictions of the Greek demi-god Herakles from the sixth century BC.

Although the style has its closest parallels in the Cypriot and Phoenician regions, this statue seems rather to be influenced by oriental art and to originate in the late phase of the 'orientalising period' (Albright 1958b, 269–70, pls 196–8). On the chest were engraved two inscriptions, the first of which is executed in large letters and gives the name of the person depicted as 'Ma'dikarib'. The second and longer boustrophedon inscription (see p. 156) is a dedication and runs from the shoulders to the bottom of the



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skirt, continuing on the right knee. A preliminary attempt was made to read this before cleaning (quoted by Albright 1958b, 270) but the full inscription can now be translated as follows:

'Ammi'anas, the son of Lahay'athat of the tribe of Kash[h]at, has dedicated this man of bronze to 'Almaqah as a fourth to the three warriors of bronze, as well as his sons Hammi'athat, Ma'dikarib, Aws'athat,

Lahay'athat and Aws, members of the Banū Kashhat, and 'Ammikarib of the Kabīr Aqyān dhū-Marhab, Dhamaryada' of the Khabīr Khalīl, Hawf'athat, son of Sharashumū, and his house Yaf'an and all their estates in the [Wādī] Adhanat and in the plain of Nashq. By 'Ahttar, 'Almaqah, dhāt-Himyam, dhāt-Ba'danum and dhāt-Basl, and by Yada'il Bayān, the King of Saba' (Seipel ed. 1998, 284).

This inscription has been dated on palaeographic grounds to the sixth century BC, a period when the rulers of Saba' ceased to use the title of *mukarrib* and adopted that of king instead.

25 Bronze statue of a young man

Mārib, Awwām temple

7th–6th centuries BC

H 43 cm, W 21 cm, TH 14.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 263

This semi-complete statue was found in the Awwām temple at Mārib where it had evidently been on public display for a considerable period as it had been broken and repaired in antiquity. It depicts a standing male figure wearing a necklace and large central pendant or amulet, with the right hand raised and the left hand originally clenching a staff or spear; the figure is wearing a wrap-around kilt held in place with a belt or, more probably, the rolled-over top of the garment, into which is tucked a straight dagger measuring 5.8 cm in length (Albright 1958b, 270–71, pls 199–200). A ten-line text written in boustrophedon script on the figure's chest can be translated as follows:

Hālīkī'amar [and] 'Ammīyatha' from the tribe of Khalīl, sons of Sharashumū, have dedicated the two bronze statues of their sons Zayd'il and Karīb'āthāt to 'Almaqah, the Lord of Awwām, in thanks for 'Almaqah granting them what He has promised him, and so that He should [continue to] grant to them. By 'Athtar and 'Almaqah (Seipel ed. 1998, 327).

26 Bronze fragment depicting a military victory

Mārib, Bar'an temple

5th century BC

H 46 cm, W 38 cm, TH 1 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a',
YM 13981 (BAR 16243)

The Bar'an temple is located in the middle of the southern oasis at Mārib, less than 2 km west from the Awwām temple and 3 km south of the city of Mārib. The structure was first identified as a temple in 1888 when the Austrian traveller, Eduard Glaser, noted an inscription on one of the building's six monolithic pillars which referred to the god 'Almaqah of Bar'an and warned against anyone trying to steal silver treasures from the temple (Vogt *et al.* 2000, 9). The



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Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Ṣana'a' (DAI), and the General Organisation for Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts (GOAMM) excavated the Bar'an temple between 1988 and 1997 and restored the structure between 1997 and 2000. The Bar'an temple was dedicated to the Sabaean national deity, 'Almaqah. The final phase of the temple, which dates to the late sixth or fifth century BC, consists of a stone paved courtyard with pillared galleries to the north, west and south. In the centre of the courtyard was a rectangular cella which originally housed an over-life-size bronze idol of a bull or an ibex, two stone altars and a statue of a *mukarrib* or other important figure. To the west of the courtyard was a raised propylon with six monolithic columns with dentil-decorated capitals, which were accessed via a monumental staircase. In front of the temple was a large, square peristyle forecourt, which was accessed via the main entrance, opposite the monumental stairs. At the foot of the staircase was a well, which was dedicated to 'Almaqah (Vogt *et al.* 2000, 9–10).

This exceptional bronze relief plaque was perhaps mounted on the door of the Bar'an temple or cella, although it could possibly represent part of a large bronze altar (see



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cat. 213). This bronze fragment appears to depict a procession of warriors who have returned victoriously from a campaign and present the severed hands of slaughtered enemies as trophies (Gerlach 2000). The text of the upper inscription reads 'Ni'mān', and the text of the lower inscription reads 'procession of Aws'athat, son of Yuha'in, the 'Ahimite' (Nebes 2000). The plaque, although fragmentary, has a vertical border containing recumbent ibexes – similar to the alabaster reliefs from the forecourt of the Bar'ān temple – and three horizontal panels, the lowermost of which probably shows the top of a palm tree. The most interesting depiction is found on the central panel, namely of six men walking in a line brandishing powerful composite bows and their trophies. The depiction of bows implies that these were used as weapons as well as a means of hunting (see cat. 212); Beeston (1976, 13) argued that the scarcity of references to bows in early Arabic literature suggested that they were not widely used in warfare, yet Arabian rock graffiti reveal bows to be the most common weapon in battle (Potts 1998, 200). The depiction of severed hands as trophies reflects a gruesome custom also practised in ancient Egypt. Above these figures are a facing pair of walking winged bulls with erect tails flanking an Assyrian-style 'Tree of Life'. The top of the panel is broken, leaving only the hooves of two further pairs of bulls, again possibly flanking a 'Tree of Life', although no trace of that is visible on the surviving fragment. The winged bulls point to foreign artistic influence, possibly from Mesopotamia, according to some authors, as winged bulls appear in Mesopotamian architecture in the ninth century when they were set up either side of the main doorways to Late Assyrian palaces. The purpose of these figures was apotropaic, in other words to offer protection to the palace and its contents. This tradition continued in Assyria until the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612 BC but was later revived with Xerxes' (485–465 BC) construction of the 'Gate of All Nations' at the entrance to the Achaemenid palace complex at Persepolis. The fifth-century date of this fragment thus implies an Achaemenid rather than Assyrian origin for the iconography.

27 Calcite-alabaster inscription

As-Sawda', Aranyada' temple

Early 7th century BC

H 80 cm, W 63 cm, TH 8 cm;

H 48.5 cm, W 63 cm, TH 8 cm

The National Museum, Şana'a',

YM 11126 and 11192

This inscription (see fig. 17) is thought to come from the temple of the god Aranyada' in as-Sawda' (ancient Nashān), which is located on the Wādī Madhāb in the Jawf.

The inscription reads as follows:

'Ammisama', the son of Sha'adhū, [from the tribe of the] Wafr, dedicated [this stela] to Aranyada' when he made a sacrifice to dhū-Qabd for the second time, and when he waged war on Awsān [with Sumhuyafa', the King of Na[shān], and because he was at war with dhu-Dawr in Najrān. At the command of Aranyada', of Wadd, of dhū-Garb, and of 'Athar Nashq, in the days of Yada'ab and of Ilumnabat, and by Ghafarat, the [deity] of his house.

This text describes a famous war in which the Sabaeen *mukarrib* Karib'il the Great destroyed the kingdom of Awsān in c. 700 BC. We know about this war through Sabaeen and Ḥadramitic sources as well as through this particular text. Presumably Sumhuyafa', the King of Nashān, had led a contingent of Nashānite forces against Awsān while he was still an ally of Saba'. However, this alliance was short-lived because Karib'il then launched two campaigns against Nashān, his fifth and sixth campaigns, to suppress general moves for independence right from the start. Yada'ab and Ilumnabat presumably are eponymous

officials (Seipel ed. 1998, 321).

Another temple dedicated to 'Athtar was excavated at as-Sawda' by the French Archaeological Mission in 1988–9. This was relatively small (15.50 x 14.10 m) and consisted of a thick outer wall surrounding a peristyle courtyard. The temple had a monumental entrance in the western end and a raised platform, flanked by two monolithic pillars, upon which were seven inscribed blocks in a hemispherical arrangement at the eastern end. The temple is a remarkably well preserved example of South Arabian religious architecture dating to the eighth century BC.

28 Granite inscription mentioning the construction of a palace by a Qatabanian *mukarrib* and relations between Saba' and Ḥadramawt

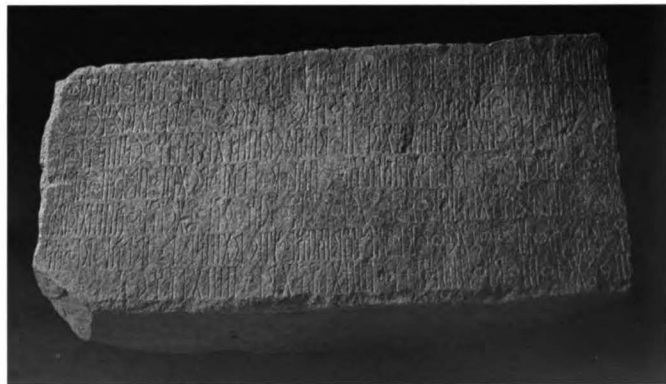
Tamna'

3rd–2nd centuries BC

H 50 cm, W 106 cm, TH 29 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 673

Tamna', the capital of the Qatabanian kingdom, was almost 20 hectares in size and was surrounded by a rectangular 1,850-m fortification wall with four stone gates. The American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM), under the direction of Wendell Phillips, excavated at Tamna' in 1950–51 (Phillips 1955). The AFSM excavated the south-west gate, which was flanked by two stone bastions (11 m high x 5 m wide) and inscribed with the laws of the city (Van Beek 1952, 7–8). Three stone structures near the



south-west gate were also excavated and they were identified as the houses Yafa', Hadath and Yafash by inscriptions on their exterior walls (Jamme 1958). The American team also uncovered a monumental building in the middle of Tamna', which was interpreted as a temple (Tamna' Temple 1) dedicated to 'Athtar, although several scholars have argued that the building may have been a royal palace (Jamme 1979, 1–59; Breton *et al.* 1997, 33–72; Breton 1998a, 153–4). The American team cleared an obelisk which was inscribed with a royal decree by Shahr Hīlāl son of Yada'ab (RES 4337) which outlined the regulations of the market place (Beeston 1959). In 1967, Brian Doe, the director of the Antiquities Department in Aden, excavated two other houses near the market named Shab'ān and Ath'ān, which were very similar to the dwellings near the south-west gate (Doe 1971, 217–25, pls 35–7). The French Archaeological Mission worked at Tamna' between 1978 and 1980 and a joint Italian–French team is currently excavating at the site (Breton 1998a, 147–55).

The first Qatabanian ruler to take the title of *mukarrib*, thereby signalling pre-eminence over all other kingdoms, was Hawfī'amm Yuhan'im son of Sumhūwatar whose reign has been dated to the sixth century BC. The Qatabanian kingdom expanded from the Wādī Bayhān and gradually conquered the land previously held by the Sabaeans. According to Strabo, the territory of the Qatabanians extended down to the Bāb al-Mandab (16.4.2). The Qatabanian kingdom enjoyed a period of prosperity that lasted until the first century BC in which Qatabanian art, inscriptions and monumental architecture were unrivalled. Tamna' suffered a tragic end; the AFSM discovered evidence of a severe conflagration and pillaging in the city which probably occurred during battles against the Ḥaḍramawt. By the first century AD the city had ceased to be occupied and Hajar ibn Ḥumayd (dhū-Ghayl), 12 km south of Tamna', had taken the role of capital until the whole kingdom was annexed by the Ḥaḍramawt. This inscription (from Tamna') reads as follows:

Yada'ab Dhūbyān Yuhan'im, son of Shahr, *mukarrib* of Qatabān and of all the children of 'Amm and of Awsān, of Kahad, of Dahas and of [Tubanū], first-born of [the gods] Anbay and Ḥawkam, he who rules and ordains, keeper of the treasure, administrator,

high priest, high priest for a second time, magician, p[riest of 'A]mm Ray'ān, Lord of Zarbat Latak [...], has built [...] its wall and its entrance area of stone, wood, alabaster, slate [?] and limestone, and all [...] and its interior decoration, with the help of a body of men from Qatabān under the leadership of 'Athtar and of 'Amm, when 'Athtar Yada'ab granted what He had pro[mised] him, and when 'Athtar, 'Amm and the gods [of Qatabān] had driven back Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt from the territory of 'Amm and Anbay, and had expelled them. By 'Athtar, by 'Amm, by Anbay, by dhāt-Ṣantim and by dhāt-Zahrān' (Seipel ed. 1998, 293).

The full title of the *mukarrib* of Qatabān is particularly long and complex; it emphasises the territorial extension of the kingdom, but also the religious functions of the *mukarrib*. This text also alludes to hostile actions of Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt, about which nothing is known from other sources so far.

29 Limestone stela mentioning an alliance between Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt in Qatabān

North of Ṣana'a'

End of 2nd or beginning of 3rd century AD

H 48 cm, w 25 cm, TH 22 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 355

This incomplete inscription appears to be a dedication by members of the tribe of Ḥamdān to the deity Ta'lab, who was worshipped in the ancient region of Sam'i in the Yemeni highlands (see also cat. 221). The deity is thanked for a particularly fortunate year, especially for a rich harvest and for the birth of a son. It also refers to the following historical event in lines 9–13:

And in this year their Lord 'Alhān, the King of Saba', has visited Yada'il, the King of Ḥaḍramawt, in order to arrange [...] and to enter into an alliance with [Ḥaḍramawt] in dhū-Ghayl, from whence they have successfully re[turned].

According to this inscription an alliance had been set up between Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt in dhū-Ghayl (modern Hajar ibn Ḥumayd), the final capital of Qatabān. The agreement between the kings 'Alhān and Yada'il in old Qatabanian territory indicates that the kingdom of Qatabān no longer existed by the end of the second or beginning of the third century AD. The last dated



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reference to the kingdom of Qatabān is to be found in a text dating from between AD 159 and 160. Therefore the end of Qatabān's independence can be dated between AD 160 and 200 (Seipel ed. 1998, 371).

30 Limestone stela with a Sabaeen inscription mentioning a battle between Saba' and Ḥimyar

Mārib, Awwām temple

AD 250

H 62 cm, w 23 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 1

The text of the inscription reads:

Kawkab Yadra' ibn Mah[ya]l and his son As'ad, officials of Ilsharah Yahdub and his brother Ya'zil Bayān, kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, sons of Far' Yanhub, the King of Saba', have dedicated these three statues, a pedestal [?] and a bronze ibex to the god 'Almaqah Thahwān, the Lord of Awwām, in thanks for his protection of their lords Ilsharah Yahdub and his brother Ya'zil Bayān, the kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, in all the campaigns they have waged, in all the battles they have fought, and in all the combats in which they have stood their ground in the plain of dhū-Hurmāt and near the town [or city] of Dalāg against Ḥimyar. As for their servant Kawkab, he has thanked the power and glory of 'Almaqah Thahwān, because He has granted him to remain safe and unscathed in all those campaigns and



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battles, and because He has granted him to return with honour, with spoils of slaughtered enemies and with booty which has delighted his heart. The spoils of the slaughtered enemies which Kawkab Yadra' has conquered in Ḥimyar and from the warriors from Sahratān amount to those of thirty-two men whom he has put out of action in the course of all those campaigns in which he served his Lords, up to the day when he dedicated this inscription, thanks to the assistance and the favour of 'Almaqah, the Lord of Awwām, and thanks to the support and the power of his lords. 'Almaqah Thahwān, the Lord of Awwām, may gain him the goodwill of his Lords Ilīsharah Yahdub and his brother Ya'zil Bayān, kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, and He may protect him from all evil and all deceitfulness as well as of all bad feeling towards him, all hostility, slander and ridicule [of every] enemy, whether known or unknown. By 'Almaqah Thahwān, the Lord of Awwām. The author dedicated items of considerable value to 'Almaqah after returning from a gruelling and undecided war against Ḥimyar, which culminated in the battle of

dhū-Hurmat at the foot of the Jabal al-Lasi on Ḥimyarite territory, some 100 km south of Ṣana'a'. This battle, which is described as a victory in Sabaeen as well as Ḥimyarite inscriptions, took place shortly before AD 253 (Seipel ed. 1998, 372).

31 Bronze plaque mentioning a battle between the Sabaeen and the Arabs in the Jawf

'Amrān

1st century BC

H 31.5 cm, W 30 cm, TH 2 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1862-10-28.9 = E48461

Presented by Brigadier-Colonel
William Marcus Coghlan

This is one of a large group of inscribed bronze plaques originally attached to the walls of one or more buildings at 'Amrān. The text was written by a Sabaeen from the highlands and not only illustrates the uneasy state of relations between Saba' and the Arabs of the Jawf, but is the earliest preserved explicit description of a battle between them. The inscription reads:

Rabib Ya'zam of the tribe Akhrif has dedicated this inscription to 'Almaqah of Hīrān, because 'Almaqah has demanded [it] from him in His oracle, and because He has kept him safe in his pilgrimage to dhū-Ma'lasān, and because 'Almaqah has granted him trophies, spoils and captives, such as is right, on all occasions in which he paid service to his Lord Yafra' ibn Marāthid, and because He has saved his servant Rabib in the battle in which he faced the Arabs in the region of Manhāt [modern Ḥizmat Abū Thawr]; and He may grant him the goodwill of his lord Yafra' and the health of [his] mental and physical capacities, [and he has dedicated] for that which was favourable for the Banū Akhrif, and will be.

The top of the plaque is decorated with hands which served an apotropaic function.

The frequency with which these plaques were used in antiquity is not only demonstrated by the large number that survive but also by the attachment holes on the façades of buildings such as the Awwām temple at Mārib and al-Hamdani's reference to the discovery as early as the tenth century of 'inscribed brass [i.e. bronze] tablets' in the 'wonderful palace' at Shahr (al-Hamdani 1938, 60).

The inscription was presented to the British Museum in 1862 by William Coghlan (1803–85), who had been appointed Political Resident and Commandant in Aden in 1854, and after whom one of the so-called Aden Tanks is named (see also cat. 219). The British began to administer Aden as part of India in 1839 following its acquisition the previous year from Sultan Maḥsin of Lahej and Aden by Commander Stafford Bettesworth Haines (1802–60), who was acting on behalf of the East India Company (Waterfield 1968). The British subsequently extended their control over the Ḥaḍramawt in what became known as the Aden Protectorate and a Crown colony from 1 April 1937 until the British withdrawal in 1967. The strategic importance of Aden was significantly enhanced in the nineteenth century with the opening of the Suez canal in 1869, as Aden was an important coaling station on the route to and from India. British military officers, political agents, district officers and other civil servants played a significant role from this period onwards in the recording and acquisition of antiquities, particularly from the Ḥaḍramawt. The first South Arabian inscription was published as early as 1834 by Lieutenant James Raymond Wellsted and – with the exception of a single coin – South Arabian antiquities entered the



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British Museum in 1854. An important collection was presented to the Museum by Coghlan in 1862 (see also cat. 219). Significantly, Coghlan's staff included Hormuzd Rassam (1826–1910). Rassam had previously excavated in Mesopotamia and Van on behalf of the Museum and was posted to Aden in 1854 as a political interpreter. He served here for eight years and later played a leading role with Lieutenant-Colonel W.F. Prideaux, Third Assistant Resident at Aden, in the controversial British dispute with Emperor Theodore II of Ethiopia (r. 1855–68) which resulted in the burning of the Ethiopian capital at Magdala; Prideaux himself also presented a number of antiquities and coins to the Museum between 1871 and 1875 (Hill 1922; see cat. 101) and according to Budge (1920, I, 38, n. 4) made a number of excavations in southern Arabia.

32 Limestone inscription dedicated by Arabs to Shams in Mārib

(Not illustrated)

Mārib

2nd century BC

H 56 cm, W 56 cm, TH 3 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1910-5-75 = 103063

This text refers to Arabs coming south to Mārib, the Sabaeen capital, where they offered this dedication to the deity Shams in his sanctuary. The inscription reads:

[...] they] [from the tribe] of Lishams, the second year, accompanied by Māliku' Afaw, the son of [...], Gahrān, the son of Hamillāt, Awsshams, the son of Wahab [...], Shamsmaslam, the son of 'Abdi, Adab'il, the son of 'A[...], the son of Kuhāl, Lishams, the son of Ashar, Mālik, the son of [...] Qasimu', Isma'il and Misk, the sons of 'Abd, Wal[...]
'Albdyatha'an, Mara'shams, the son of Taymqa'fwu', all [from the tribe of [...]] the son of Wāhbān, Hāmī, the son of Yada'nibihī, all from the tribe of the Sa [...], the son of Raf'at, all of the tribe of 'Uqn; Taymān, the son of 'Awdhlaqad [...], all of the tribe of Yabruq; Sālih, Hadadqa[...], the son of Ilisamī', Bimulkihī, the son of Ilisamī', [...] dedicated to Shams, the protectress of the Balqā', she who is from 'Ammisa[na] (Seipel ed. 1998, 375).



33

33 Limestone stela mentioning the last King of Qatabān, Nabat Yuhān'im

Al-Hinū

About AD 160

H 50 cm, W 24 cm, TH 14 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 511

The authors of this inscription are two women (Gaddina'am and Hamad'ali), as well as a son (Abikarib) and daughter (Na'amgadd), who supported the military operations of the last King of Qatabān north of Ṣana'a' (Rahbatān) and, further to the south, in the territory of Ḥimyar. The text can be dated approximately to the year AD 160 and is one of the last epigraphic records of the kingdom of Qatabān and demonstrates that women could play a significant social role in this culture. It also shows that the great sanctuary Ḥatab dedicated to 'Amm and the royal palace Ḥarib, which were both originally located in Tamna', were moved to dhū-Ghayl (modern Hajar ibn Ḥumayd), which lies about 12 km to the south. It is assumed that the Qatabanians, under threat from the Arab tribes infiltrating from the north, abandoned Tamna' during the course of the first century AD. One of the two patron deities of the royal palace is the Arab goddess al-'Uzzā ('Uzzayān in Qatabanian), an indication that the population of Qatabān contained a significant Arab

component. The inscription can be translated in full as follows:

Gaddina'am, Hamad'ali and both their children Abikarib and Na'amgadd from the tribes of Mashfarat, Tahthakān, and Faqdatān have dedicated a statue of bronze to their Lord ['Amm dhū-Daw]n in [his sanctuary] Ḥatab in the city of [dhū-Gh]ayl, in accordance with the [promise?] that they gave Him for the success of their Lord [Naba]t Yuhān'im, King of Qatabān, on the day on which he led a campaign as far as Rahbatān against the King of Saba' and the province of Ḥimyar. May 'Amm keep granting them (that which is right and proper), in any request that they may make of His authority concerning the welfare of their Lord Nabat Yuhān'im, the King of Qatabān, their own welfare, and the successful outcome of their enterprises. They put this statue under the protection of 'Amm dhū-Dawn against anyone who might remove it from this place. By 'Athtar Shāriqān, 'Amm dhū-Dawn, 'Anbay, the divine patron, Nashbat and 'Uzzayān, the patron deities of the [palace] Ḥarib (Seipel ed. 1998, 372).

34 Calcite-alabaster statue of Yasuduq'il Far', King of Awsān

Wādī Markha

1st century BC

H 70 cm, W 31 cm, TH 26 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 611

This is one of three statues belonging to kings of Awsān which are believed to have been found at the royal cemetery of Awsān, the location of which Pirenne (1980; 1981) proposed to be at Khazinet ed-Darb in the the Wādī Markha. Pirenne also suggested that the equivalent royal residence may have been at Hajar as-Sa'ada, directly across the wādī. The kingdom of Awsān lay south-east of the kingdoms of Qatabān and Saba' and was centred around the Wādī Markha. It is probable although not certain that the site of Hajar Yahirr, which was discovered in 1971 at the northern end of the Wādī Markha, was the capital of the kingdom of Awsān.

In 1952 H. St J.B. Philby noticed some ancient irrigation structures during his exploration of the Wādī Markha but did not find the remains of the city (Philby 1939, 347–8). In 1971 J. Pirenne noted a stone obelisk beside the ruins of a large building



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and a long mound covered in stone. Hajar Yahirr remains unexcavated but it is clear that Pirenne had discovered a city surrounded by a mudbrick enclosure wall faced on both sides with stone, which was originally around 1,700 m long.

There are a number of stone foundations visible inside the enclosure wall and 100 m east of Hajar Yahirr are the remains of a temple. To the west of the city is a stone obelisk that was originally 2.5 m high which Pirenne had seen. There are traces of irrigation agriculture beginning 5 km to the south-west of the site. This was clearly an extensive site of considerable importance with ancient occupation and an outer wall dated by Breton to the eighth to sixth centuries BC (1994b; 1998a, 136, 162). Bāfaqih (1993, 79) suggests that Hajar Yahirr held hegemony over other tribes and had become a *mukarribate*. The city became a threat to other tribes and it was destroyed by Karib'il Watār, son of Dhama'alī towards the middle of the seventh century BC.¹ Thereafter, the political history of the kingdom of Awsān is unclear. However, the discovery of these three royal inscribed statues dating between the first century BC and first century AD prove that it must have regained

importance at least on a scale sufficient for these rulers to commission these statues, and possibly after gaining independence from Qatabān.

These three statues of the kings of Awsān are remarkable for their detailed carved treatment of facial features, hair, dress and jewellery and the fact that they represent three generations of Awsāni kings. The inscription on the base of this statue reads: 'Yasuduq'il Far', King of Awsān, son of Ma'ad'il'. The king is portrayed wearing a wrap-around skirt, similar to the *futah* worn in Yemen today; the belt and the end of the skirt are marked with a simple line. He is shown wearing an armlet with a prominent oval setting and two bracelets on his left arm and a ring with an oval setting on his left hand between the first and second joint of his fourth finger (see cat. 136). He is also wearing sandals with a thong between the second and third toe. This statue may be the first in a line of Awsāni kings after Awsān regained independence from the Qatabanian kingdom, because the father of Yasuduq'il Far', is not mentioned as being a king, as in the other two statues (Pirenne 1986, vol. II, 305–7; Antonini 2001, 92–3, pl. 46).

1 RES 3945/12.

35 Calcite-alabaster statue of Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at, King of Awsān

Wādī Markha

1st century AD

H 70 cm, W 28 cm, TH 19 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 609

The inscription on the base reads: 'Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at, King of Awsān, son of Ma'ad'il Salhān, King of Awsān'. It is interesting to note the change in dress style of these kings; this particular king is wearing a garment similar to the Roman toga with a pleated tunic and a draped cloak over the top. He has long hair and wears a circular cap or crown. There are holes in his clenched hands, which indicate that he originally held objects. There has been a wide range of opinions over the dating of this statue. The costume was initially considered to be Graeco-Roman and the statue was given a second-century BC date. However, as this theory did not accord with the assumption that the kingdom of Awsān had been totally destroyed by the *mukarrib* of Saba', Karib'il Watār, it was assigned an earlier date.

However, epigraphic analysis of the letter forms of the inscription and Roman parallels for the costume suggest a first-century AD date and it has now been concluded that the kingdom of Awsān therefore could not have been completely destroyed by Karib'il Watār and indeed underwent a renaissance with their liberation from the Qatabanian kingdom in the first century BC (Pirenne 1986, vol. II, 313–15; Antonini 2001, 93–4, pl. 46).



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36 Calcite-alabaster statue of Ma'ad'il Salhān, King of Awsān

Wādī Markha

1st century BC

H 88 cm, W 28 cm, TH 15 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 612

The base of this imposing statue is inscribed 'Ma'ad'il Salhān, son of Yasuduq'il, King of Awsān'. This is probably the son of

Yasuduq'il Far' (cat. 34). This particular king has shorter hair, a stubble beard and moustache, and wears sandals, a plain upper garment and a wrap-around skirt with a fringe. The king wears a circular cap or crown and a bracelet on his left arm. On this arm he is also wearing an armband of three loop-in-loop chains with a large central gem setting (Pirenne 1986, vol. II, 309–11; Antonini 2001, 93, pl. 46; see also cat. 134).

37 Calcite-alabaster stela with Ethiopian inscription describing the Abyssinian invasion of Yemen

Mārib

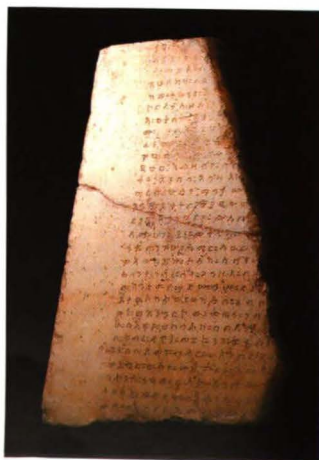
AD 530

H 70 cm, W 41 cm, TH 10 cm

The National Museum, Sana'a, YM 1049

This fragmentary inscription was found in Mārib. It is written in old Ethiopian language and script (Ge'ez), the latter deriving from the old South Arabian alphabet. It refers to the Abyssinian invasion of Yemen, during the course of which the reigning King Joseph (Yūsūf As'ar Yath'ar) was deposed in AD 525 or 529/30. The many Biblical quotations are typical of Abyssinian inscriptions, part of which can be translated as follows:

[...] his name [was] Hagareynē [= al-Hajarayn ?], and he killed [...] 'Uq]n'el, the deposed King of Hamar [= Ḥimyar], and [...] and I burnt down the [royal] palace of Saba[...]. (Seipel ed. 1998, 377).



37

Kings, Kingdoms and Chronology

ROBERT HOYLAND

They are the richest nations in the world,
seeing that such vast wealth flows in upon them
from both the Roman and Parthian Empires;
for they sell the produce of the sea or of their forests,
while they purchase nothing whatever in return.



FIG. 19 Quadrangular monumental script giving the name of the Sabaean ruler Yitha'amar Bāyān, son of Sumhū'alay Yanūf, Mārib, 6th–5th centuries BC, reused upside-down in a later building. (Photo: R. Hoyland)

South Arabia is a very ancient land, and every year excavations bring us new finds from the advanced cultures which flourished there before Islam. As early as the fourth and third millennia BC there is evidence for irrigation, animal husbandry, manufacture of practical, ornamental and ritual objects from stone, clay and bronze, and erection of funerary structures,¹ yet it is not until the early first millennium BC that we have any evidence for writing. Hence it is only from this time that we can begin to record a history of South Arabia.²

No literary texts survive from pre-Islamic Arabia, but for the reconstruction of the history of ancient Yemen we are fortunate enough to have at our disposal some 10,000 inscriptions, a corpus which is constantly growing as fresh discoveries are made. Most are brief, use formulaic language and treat only a limited range of subjects (notably prayers and dedication of gifts to deities, and commemoration of military exploits and building works), but they are precious for being testimonies of the people themselves. Unfortunately, however, they are not dated according to any absolute era until the second century AD (prior to this they were dated, if at all, according to the year in office of certain key officials) and they almost never allude to events outside southern Arabia. Scholars have tried to arrange them in chronological order according to the style of their script, which certainly did undergo change over time (figs 19–21). However, our ignorance of the pace of this palaeographic change, which was perhaps faster at some times than others, and the paucity of firmly dated examples to provide a fixed point, means that this method can offer no more than an approximate indication. It is also difficult to know to what epoch to assign the earliest inscriptions. It used to be argued that the quadrangular monumental style of script of the great South Arabian rulers, usually considered to belong to the earliest period, was inspired by the Greek monumental script of the sixth/fifth centuries BC.³



FIG. 20 Inscribed altar, 1st century BC (cat. 214).

FIG. 21 Inscription from Husn al-Ghurāb, 6th century AD, CIH 621. (Photo: R. Hoyland)

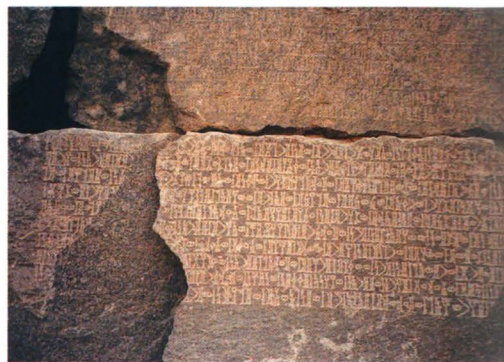
However, archaeological excavations at a number of sites (for example, Hajar ibn Ḥumayd and Yalā) have yielded evidence of substantial settlement from the late second or early first millennium BC, including some very short South Arabian inscriptions on pottery. This, together with the mention of sovereigns of Saba' in Assyrian texts of the eighth/seventh centuries BC, has led to a revision of the earliest inscriptions to the early first millennium BC. Nevertheless, South Arabian chronology remains an inexact science, and it is therefore very difficult to produce a sequential narrative of early South Arabian history.

EARLIEST HISTORICAL TIMES (c. 1000–400 BC)

The country's very mountainous terrain impeded the formation of a single regime, and political power was in general fragmented among the various peoples of

South Arabia. Each would seem to have constituted a cult community, a human collective bound together by allegiance to a patron god and presided over by a ruler who took the title of 'king' (*mlk*) and sometimes 'unifier' (*mkrb*). There were probably many other ties, such as language and residence in or dependence upon a city, but it is the cult and its sanctuaries that play the most important roles in forging the identity of each community. Many such kingdoms feature in the inscriptions, some of which seem to disappear as time goes on, presumably absorbed by others which sought to expand their sway over a greater expanse of territory. The first whose exploits we can track is Saba' (Sheba), whose rulers are the most abundantly attested in the surviving records.

The Sabaeans were principally defined by their allegiance to the god 'Almaqah.⁴ They were 'the progeny [*wld*] of 'Almaqah',⁵ bound together by common sanctuaries, rituals, festivals and ruler. Their territory was probably limited initially to Mārib and its environs,



but the military exploits of various leaders added new lands and the latter's inhabitants were also expected to pay respects to 'Almaqah. Thus a monarch in the region of the Jawf together with his people Kaminahū (Kamna) erected two towers [of the city walls of Nashq] for 'Almaqah and for [the kings of] Mārib and for Saba'.⁶ And upon its defeat the kingdom of Nashān was obliged 'to construct a temple of 'Almaqah in the centre of the city'.⁷ In addition, we frequently encounter the expression 'Saba' and the union [*gw*],⁸ which refers to a much bigger entity. The author of one inscription includes in his dedication mention of 'all the gods, patron deities, kings and peoples of Saba' and the union'.⁹ Here we have something like a federation, of which Saba' assumed the headship. The common link was allegiance to the high god 'Ahtar and the union was regularly renewed at a ceremony in his

temple on the ancient Kawran mountain (modern Jabal al-Lawdh in the Jawf). The union presumably served to maintain peace and security among its members, particularly respect for each other's holy places and sacred times, and possibly to facilitate mutual aid in times of hardship and cooperation in grand ventures (especially hydraulic construction).

Ostensibly the earliest reference to the Sabaeans is found in the Biblical narrative of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon in the tenth century BC.¹⁰ Of course the Biblical account is intended to exalt the Israelite monarch, who was so 'very wise', and the god of Israel, and the exotic name of Saba' may only have been slipped in at a later date to further that aim. Yet the assumption of the report, that relations between South Arabia and the Mediterranean had already been established in the tenth century BC, may have some basis in fact.¹¹ Whatever the case, we have to wait until the mid-eighth century before we have firm literary testimony. At this time a governor of Sukhu in the area of the Middle Euphrates launched a punitive raid upon a caravan belonging to 'the people of Tayma and Saba' whose own country is far away, whose messengers had never come to me and who had never travelled to meet me'. He clearly felt affronted, for, so he tells us, 'I captured one hundred of them alive; I captured their two hundred camels together with their loads . . . every kind of merchandise.'¹² A little later a certain 'Ita'amara the Sabaean' – mentioned alongside a King of Egypt and a queen of the Arabs, so likely himself to be a sovereign – sent aromatics and precious stones to Sargon II (721–705) in 716 BC, as did 'Karib'il King of Saba' to Sennacherib (704–681) some thirty years afterwards.¹³ These two names are commonly found among lists of Sabaean rulers, so we cannot be sure which are meant, but it is at least possible to say that Saba' was already flourishing in the eighth century BC.

The Sabaean sovereign most frequently mentioned in inscriptions is Karib'il Watâr, son of Dhama'alî. He would seem to have been responsible for the rise of Saba' to pre-eminence in southern Arabia, and his deeds are commemorated in two lengthy texts engraved on two massive blocks in the grand temple of the Sabaean national god 'Almaqah at Şirwâh.¹⁴ The first details his military campaigns in which he won 'for 'Almaqah and Saba' control of the incense route, crushing the kingdoms of Awsân and Nashân which lay to the south-east and north-west respectively, and extending Sabaean influence over the fertile agricultural lands of the highlands both to the north and to the south. With these great conquests completed, Karib'il set about consolidating his gains, as is recorded in the second inscription. He fortified towns, initiated

irrigation works and installed Sabaean colonies in the vanquished areas.

THE GOLDEN AGE (c. 400–100 BC)

The Assyrians and Persians tell us almost nothing about South Arabia, but the Greeks and Romans, beneficiaries of a number of exploratory expeditions to that part of the world, are much more informative, although it still remained for them a strange and exotic land. Two of our earliest Greek sources on southern Arabia, Theophrastus of Eresus (372–287 BC) and Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 284–202 BC), describe it as dominated by four major kingdoms. In the words of the latter these were 'the Minaeans, on the side towards the Red Sea, whose largest city is Qarnaw [Ma'in]; next to these, the Sabaeans, whose metropolis is Mârib [Mariaba]; third, Qatabanians . . . whose royal seat is called Tamna' [Tamna]; and farthest towards the east, the Hadramites, whose city is Shabwa [Sabata]'.¹⁵ These capital cities, along with those of a number of more minor peoples, were all located on the fringes of the desert known to medieval Arab geographers as the Şayhad (modern Ramlat as-Sab'atayn). A site in the cooler and more verdant highlands might have seemed a more sensible choice, but it was via the perimeter of the desert that aromatics passed on their long journey to the Mediterranean and Mesopotamia. Whoever wished to participate in this trade was therefore obliged to take up a position near this route and construct large-scale irrigation works to sustain the population.

The only South Arabian people to speak about trade in their inscriptions are the Minaeans, who established themselves as a thriving economic power in their own right. Unlike the other three major kingdoms they advanced no political pretensions – their rulers fought no wars and minted no coins – but instead concentrated on commerce. Although their territory was small they traded far and wide, sending out caravans to Egypt, Gaza, Syria, Mesopotamia and Tyre. Their name was practically synonymous with aromatics in the eyes of consumers ('Minaean frankincense' appears in a few Greek papyri from Egypt, one dated 261 BC).¹⁶ And in addition Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) tells us that it was the Minaeans 'who originated the trade and who chiefly practise it'.¹⁷ The Minaeans are also the only people to have composed a text which refers to an event external to southern Arabia. Its authors are the merchants 'Ammisadaq and Sa'd, who thank their gods for bringing them home safely from an expedition to Egypt despite 'the hostilities which Saba' and Khawlân had engaged upon against their persons' and despite 'the conflict which took place between the Medes and the Egyptians'.¹⁸ This latter incident could

FIG. 22. Altar from Delos with a Minaean inscription. (Delos Museum, Greece, A 7809)



refer to the campaign of either the Achaemenid ruler Artaxerxes III Ochus (358–338) in 343 BC or possibly to that of Cambyses (529–522) in 525 BC, or else to some more minor skirmish which occurred between the two powers. In lists recording payment for foreign women to be admitted into Minaean society there are thirty-two references to Gaza, a city that enjoyed great prosperity and fame during the Persian period (539–334 BC).¹⁹ One Minaean trader died in Egypt and, according to the inscription on his sarcophagus, 'he imported myrrh and calamus for the temples of the gods of Egypt'.²⁰ It is dated to the twenty-second year of Ptolemy, son of Ptolemy, which allows us to place it somewhere between 262 and 59 BC. Finally a Greek-Minaean bilingual inscription from the Mediterranean island of Delos conveys the dedication of an altar to 'Wadd and the Minaean gods', most likely executed shortly after Delos's transformation into a free port in 166 BC (fig. 22).²¹ Though precision is as yet impossible, we can at least deduce from all these texts that the Minaeans flourished between about 500 and 100 BC.²²

The kingdom of Qatabān is recorded for the first time in the aforementioned inscription of Karib'il Watar, where it appears as an ally of Saba'. Some time later inscriptions speak of conflict between Saba' and Qatabān. One, for example, is dated to 'the time of the war which was led by . . . the kings of Saba', Saba' itself, and their allied tribes . . . against Yada'ab [King

of Qatabān], Qatabān and the progeny of 'Amm [the Qatabanians]'.²³ It is also noticeable that at some point the rulers of Qatabān claim sovereignty over places formerly under Sabaeen influence, and indeed Qatabanian inscriptions have been discovered in these places. The implication is that Qatabān was now, like Saba' before it, pursuing an expansionist policy. Eratosthenes of Cyrene states that their 'territory extends down to the straits and the passage across the Arabian Gulf', but says nothing about the Sabaeen lands.²⁴ Thus it would seem that by the third century BC Qatabān was challenging Saba's dominant position in southern Arabia. And it is presumably to this period of expansion that one should attribute many of the magnificent tombs found on the slopes of Jabal Hayd ibn 'Aqil outside the capital Tamna' and housed the exquisitely fashioned memorials of the great and good of the city. Our knowledge of the kingdom of Ḥaḍramawt is even scantier due to a dearth of inscriptions, but its career would seem to be similar to that of Qatabān. Excavations at its capital give the impression that it was prospering about the fourth to second centuries BC when substantial fortifications and many secular and religious buildings were constructed.

A TIME OF TRANSITION (c. 100 BC–AD 300)

The first century BC seems to be a turning point in the history of South Arabia, since the peoples located around the Ṣayhad desert who had dominated the region's affairs up until this point were now gradually overtaken by the tribes of the highlands. One factor in this transition was the establishment of a regular maritime link between the Mediterranean world, Arabia and India. Frequent attempts had been made to sail from Egypt to India with mixed success, but the first to do it repeatedly and with the aid of, rather than in spite of, the monsoon winds, was Eudoxus of Cyzicus, who accomplished three successful voyages between 117 and 109 BC.²⁵ This traffic was greatly boosted when Augustus incorporated Egypt into the Roman Empire, so that by the end of the first century BC Strabo could report, from first-hand experience, that 'as many as one hundred and twenty vessels were sailing from Myos Hormos to India, whereas formerly, under the Ptolemies, only a very few ventured to undertake the voyage and to carry on traffic in Indian merchandise'.²⁶ This meant that the future in South Arabia lay in ports not in caravan cities. Ḥaḍramawt realised this and established harbours at Qāni' (next to modern Bīr 'Alī) and Sumhuram or Samhar (modern Khawr Rūrī in south Oman). A mid-first-century AD author of a handbook on maritime trade known as the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* informs us that the former harbour 'belongs to the kingdom of Eleazos

[King of the Ḥaḍramawt], the frankincense-bearing land' and that 'all the frankincense grown in the land is brought into Qāni' as if to a warehouse, by camel as well as by rafts of a local type made of leather bags, and by boats'.²⁷

A second possible factor in the decline of the old South Arabian caravan cities was Rome's attempted invasion. The result of the battle of Actium in 31 BC with its defeat of Cleopatra (c. 51–30 BC) was that the Emperor Augustus was in possession of Egypt and its Red Sea coast. It then occurred to him to extend Roman domination over the whole of the Red Sea, giving the empire control of all trade coming from India and Arabia. His personal motive was probably to better Alexander the Great, who had long fascinated him and who had once boasted to his tutor, in vain, that he would conquer the incense-producing lands. But additionally, as Strabo notes, 'he hoped either to enjoy the Arabians as his rich friends or to subjugate them as his rich enemies', for it was well known 'that they were very wealthy, and that they sold aromatics and the most valuable stones for gold and silver, but never expended with outsiders any part of what they received in exchange'.²⁸ To this end in 26 BC Augustus dispatched the commander Aelius Gallus. However, the Nabataeans 'misguided him through places that had no roads and by circuitous routes and through regions destitute of everything'. This, together with the sickness of many of his army, meant that Gallus did not reach southern Arabia until 25 BC. There he captured a number of cities and began the siege of Marsiaba (Mārib?), 'but for want of water desisted' and after six days was obliged to retrace his steps. He nevertheless claimed a victory for Augustus, and on his return was able to greatly expand Roman knowledge of this distant land.²⁹

The most famous of the highland kingdoms of South Arabia was Ḥimyar, described by Pliny as 'the most numerous tribe' of Arabia.³⁰ They had their capital at Ṣafār in the fertile southern highlands, whence led a road to the port of Mouza at the northern end of the straits of Bāb al-Mandab, where Arabia almost touches Africa. The *Periplus* relates that this port 'teems with Arabs – shipowners or charterers and sailors – and is astir with commercial activity, for they share in the trade across the water [the African coast] and with Barygaza [on the Indian coast], using their own outfits'. The manual further notes that 'Ṣafār, the metropolis' is 'the residence of Karib'il, legitimate King of the two nations, the Ḥimyarites and the one lying next to it, called the Sabaeans'.³¹

The reference to Karib'il being King of two nations refers to the fact that Saba' was obliged, through straitened circumstances, to seek a coalition with Ḥimyar, thus forming the united monarchy of 'Saba' and dhū-

Raydān'. In the second century AD, however, the fortunes of the Sabaeans people revived somewhat and they began to campaign vigorously against the Ḥimyarites. During this period of renaissance, which lasted about a century and a half, the temple of 'Almaqah at Mārib became once more an important religious centre and dedications were numerous, a new coinage was inaugurated, and the magnificent palace of Ghumdān was built at the highland town of Ṣana'a', which had been elevated to the status of capital city alongside Mārib. This efflorescence and the continual warring between the various kingdoms means that we have many inscriptions from this period, each side dedicating gifts to the deities in order to have them on their side. What is noticeable about a number of these texts is that they are for the first time dated according to specific eras (for example, the era of Mabḥūd, son of Abḥad; the era of Ab'alay; the era of Nabat; and the era of Bakr, son of 'Amrat) the names presumably representing founders of dynasties or the like. For this period we are therefore able to produce lists of rulers and a fairly full outline of events.

At the end of the third century AD the Sabaeans kingdom seems simply to fade away and we hear no more of Saba' as an independent power. The Minaeans had already lost their influence in the course of the first century BC. Ḥimyar and Ḥaḍramawt appropriated and divided up Qatabān's territories in the late second century AD. Finally in the late third century, King Shammar Yuḥar'ish of Ḥimyar conquered Ḥaḍramawt, which subsequently ceased to be a major player on the political stage. The period of Mabḥūd son of Abḥad, used by Ḥimyar and so referred to by modern scholars as the Ḥimyarite era, now became commonly used throughout South Arabia, and on an inscription dated 409 of this era (AD 299) Shammar styled himself 'King of Saba' and of dhū-Raydān and Ḥaḍramawt and Yamanat', reflecting the fact that southern Arabia had become a unified state for the first time.³²

EXPANSION AND OCCUPATION (c. 300 BC–AD 600)

The kings of Ḥimyar, now masters of all South Arabia, followed the example of Saba' and Ḥaḍramawt in extending their influence over the Arab tribes to the north. An inscription dated to the year 470 (AD 360) enumerates the military campaigns of certain Ḥimyarite kings, who advanced as far as Yabrin (an oasis in east Arabia), Jaww (modern Yamama in north-east Arabia) and Kharj (central Arabia), subduing a number of Arab tribes, such as Ma'add and 'Abd al-Qays, both defeated at Siyyan, north-east of Makka. Subsequent Ḥimyarite monarchs cultivated links with the tribe of Kinda, appointing them to keep order among the Arab tribes of central Arabia, and so

adopted the additional title of 'kings . . . of their Arabs of the highlands of the coast'.³³

Around AD 300 the Ḥimyarite King, Shammar Yuhar'ish, sent an envoy to the kings of the Arab tribes of al-Azd and Tanūkh, and also to Ctesiphon and 'Seleucia' (Veh Ardashir), the twin cities which formed the capital of Persia. A few decades later there was an exchange of ambassadors and peaceful relations were established between Ḥimyar and Ethiopia. About the same time the Byzantine Emperor Constantius (337–61) dispatched ambassadors accompanied by the missionary Theophilus the Indian to the ruler of the Ḥimyarites, seeking permission to build churches for the use of visiting Byzantine merchants and 'of any others who might incline towards Christianity'.³⁴ By this time, then, southern Arabia was becoming involved in superpower politics. This was to intensify dramatically in the early sixth century when full-scale war broke out between Ethiopia and Ḥimyar. Christian writers portray these events in terms of religious oppression and martyrdom. However, there is no suggestion in indigenous sources of persecution of Christians merely for their faith. The objection seems rather to be political, for extension of Christianity was perceived as extension of Byzantine political influence, which was opposed by pro-Persian parties and champions of Yemen's independence. The death of a considerable number of the Christian inhabitants of Najrān is recorded both in Byzantine literary texts and South Arabian inscriptions, giving us for the first time in South Arabian history an accurate synchronism. The former date it to 835 of the era of Seleucus (AD 523) and the latter to 633 of the Ḥimyarite era, meaning that this era began in 110 BC (although 115 BC remains a possibility).³⁵

The puppet king installed by the Ethiopians was ousted by Abraha, 'a Christian, but a slave of a Roman citizen who was engaged in the business of shipping in the city of Adoulis'.³⁶ He proved to be an able ruler and was the last great monarch of South Arabia. He successfully fought off attempts by the Ethiopians to oust him, though he continued to send them tribute. By 658 (AD 548), however, he felt able to assume the title of king and, according to a lengthy inscription at the Mārib dam,³⁷ he received embassies from no less than five neighbouring powers. He also managed to quell a revolt by his appointee over the Arab tribe of Kinda,³⁸ and in 552 he reasserted South Arabian authority over central Arabia by launching two campaigns, one led by himself to Haliban, west of modern Riyadh (often equated with the expedition of the elephant alluded to in the Qur'ān 105), and the other by his Arab allies. With an inscription of 669 (AD 559), the last-dated South Arabian text known, a long era of history comes to an end.³⁹ Thereafter, according to Arabic sources, the Ethiopian presence grew stronger and more tyrannical, prompting the heroic and semi-legendary Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan to seek the help of the Emperor of Iran, Khusrau I (531–79), who dispatched an army of jailbirds under the command of a nobleman called Wahriz. Together they sailed off to Yemen, defeated the pro-Ethiopian faction and entered Ṣana'a' victorious. Sayf was made king on the understanding that he would remit taxes to Khusrau every year and Wahriz returned to Persia. However, Sayf was stabbed to death by a group of Ethiopian servants and Khusrau dispatched Wahriz once more, this time to bring Yemen under direct Persian rule.⁴⁰ And so it remained until the young Muslim state took charge in c. AD 628.

Coins

The first pre-Islamic South Arabian coin was published in 1868 by A. de Longpérier, yet despite subsequent publications from the late nineteenth century by several eminent scholars, the numismatic study of this part of the ancient Near East still remains in the phase of data collection.¹ The most important of the early numismatic studies on pre-Islamic South Arabian coinage was without doubt the British Museum *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia* (Hill 1922). In preparing this fundamental volume G.F. Hill had studied all known South Arabian pieces from the major European museums. A new phase of South Arabian numismatic studies started in the 1980s and 1990s when pieces from different regions of Yemen, including several very important coin hoards, surfaced in private and public collections or in the hands of the coin dealers. At the same time numerous archaeological reports brought to light important numismatic finds, including those from Khawr Rūri (ancient Sumhuram), Shabwa (ancient Shabwat, the capital of the Ḥadramawt kingdom), Bi'r 'Alī settlement (ancient Qāni') and sites in the Yemeni highlands, but even now there is no corpus that assesses purely numismatic aspects such as typology, iconography and weight standard, together with historical and epigraphic studies.

For a long period the numismatic material from South Arabia was classified in general terms as South Arabian coinage, and definitions such as 'Sabaeen coinage', 'Ḥimyarite coinage', 'Qatabanian' or 'Ḥimyarite-Qatabanian series', or 'Hadrami coinage' were very rarely used. However, the 'national' coinage of the different South Arabian kingdoms can now be defined more precisely. The names Ḥarīb (*hrb*), Raydān (*rydn*) and Shaqār (*šqr*) on the reverse of the coins – the names of the royal residences in Qatabān, Ḥimyar and Ḥadramawt respectively – can be considered as the names of the royal mints, denoting at the same time the 'nationality' of coinage and the mintage of different South Arabian states. The so-called 'twisted oblong symbol', the symbol of the supreme Sabaeen god 'Almaqah, and the so-called 'signs of Sabaeen *mukarribi*' may have had a similar function for Sabaeen coinage.

The chronology of South Arabian coinage is the most disputed question.² We have, at least, the *terminus post quem* for the early imitation series but the dating of the pieces with only local iconography is very uncertain. There are no dates or other chronological indicators in the coin legends. There are very few iconographic features that can be compared with the elements of Hellenistic or Roman coinage with well-established chronology. There are no coin hoards from South Arabia which have dated foreign series in addition to the local ones. The names of the rulers who issued South Arabian coins, where they do occur, are very rare and it is difficult to correlate them with the rulers attested in South Arabian inscriptions. Thus, the only means of arriving at an approximate chronology of South Arabian coinage is with the aid of archaeology, when South Arabian coins have been recovered from independently dated archaeological strata.³

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¹ The Payne Knight bequest to the British Museum in 1824 included a first- to second-century-AD Ḥimyarite coin in the series with two heads (cats 83–4), with the king's name 'Amdān Bayān (Hill 1922, 70, no. 4). This may therefore be the first South Arabian coin to enter a museum collection as well as the first South Arabian antiquity to be registered in the British Museum (see also cat. 31).

² Discussed with further references by Schippmann (2001, 114–16); see also Munro-Hay (1997), Oddy (1998), Schlumberger (1880), Sedov (1997c) and Sedov and Aydarus (1995).

³ We are very grateful to Andrew Meadows (Department of Coins and Medals, the British Museum) for his assistance with this section.

The first coins in South Arabia

38–9 Athenian tetradrachms of the 'old style' and their 'oriental imitations'

From the Karaman hoard, Asia Minor
Late 5th–early 4th centuries BC
Silver, 17.13 g, 17 g
The British Museum, London,
CM 1948-7-12,26; 1947-7-6,8



The beginning of coin circulation in Arabia Felix can be dated to the late fifth to early fourth centuries BC and probably was closely related to the commercial ties that existed at that period between the Mediterranean world and South Arabia. The first coins known to South Arabians were, no doubt, the Athenian tetradrachms of the so-called 'old style' and the local 'oriental imitations' and we may consider these to be the first coins used in South Arabia. According to some scholars the term *balatat/balat* which occurred in some South Arabian inscriptions of the last centuries BC and is usually translated as 'coin/coins', is simply an adaptation of the Greek *pallav* 'pallavde', referring in the fifth to fourth centuries BC to the Attic tetradrachms with the head of the goddess Pallas Athena on the obverse (Robinson 1948, 48, pl. V, 6, 7).

AVS

Coinage of Qatabān

40–47 Imitations of Athenian coins of the 'old style'

Qatabān

4th–3rd centuries BC

Silver; Qatabanian tetradrachms, 16.0–16.5 g;
didrachm with letter *k* on the obverse, 8.4 g;
hemidrachms (triobol) with letter *g* on the obverse,
1.9–2.0 g

The National Museum, Ṣana'a',

YM 45; 47; 64; 8; 3; 4; 6; 38

It is not surprising that the first series of coins minted in South Arabia was deeply influenced by the style of Athenian coinage. Qatabanian coinage was probably the earliest in pre-Islamic Yemen. Its oldest coins can be considered as very accurate imitations of the Attic pieces: their obverse bears the head of Athena with lozenge or triangular eyes, circular earring and helmet adorned with olive leaves, while on the reverse we find the owl with large globular eyes, the lunar crescent and olive-spray on the top left and Greek legend ΑΘΕ on the right downwards. South Arabian letters were added on Athena's cheek to distinguish different values. The 'nationality' of the early coins or, it is probably more accurate to say, their royal mint was indicated by a monogram on the reverse which can be identified from the inscriptions as the royal Qatabanian monogram.

It seems likely that the 'Qatabanian owls' were based on a weight system which was rather close to the Attic standard for coinage. Their weights were very similar to those of Athenian tetradrachms (16.0–18.0 g for pieces without South Arabian letter on Athena's cheek), didrachms (7.2–8.7 g for pieces with letter *k*), drachms (3.8–4.1 g for pieces with letter *n*) and hemidrachms or triobols (1.8–2.0 g for pieces with letter *g*). On the other hand, we cannot exclude the possibility that the coincidence of these weights was accidental and that the weight system of Qatabanian coins was purely local, although we do not know anything about it from other material, and even from the known inscriptions. A series with such a full set of denominations as the 'Qatabanian owls' was probably used both for international commerce and for local transactions (Abdullah, Ghaleb and Sedov 1997, nos 3, 11, 27, 65, 82, 97, 116, 117).

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48–9 Series with two heads

Qatabān

2nd century BC

Silver; without mint-name, 1.78 g;
with mint-name Harib, 1.69 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Sabaeans I, 52, nos 71–2



Probably around the early second century BC the 'Qatabanian owls' were replaced by the series with local iconography. The obverse now bears a beardless male head with short curly hair and the reverse a bearded male head in 'Hellenized' style with hair taken up behind in a kind of chignon. The image on the reverse is usually accompanied by monograms, letters and symbols. The ruler who made those changes put his name Yada'ab (*yd'ab*) and his title 'King of Qatabān' (*mlk qtn*) or the words 'King of Qatabān set up' (*mlk qtn s'ym*) on the obverse and reverse of the earliest coins in the series. It is very tempting to identify him with Yada'ab

Dhubayan Yuhargib, King of Qatabān (c. 155–135 BC), a king also known from the inscriptions. Most likely, the same ruler also replaced the royal monogram with the name of Harib (*hrb*) – the name of his royal residence and, probably, the royal mint – in the exergue on the reverse of the last issues in the series (Hill 1922, 52, pl. VII, 25–6).

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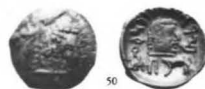
50 Series with two heads

Qatabān

1st century BC–1st century AD

Silver; Yada'ab Yanūf, 1.58 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Katabania, 75, no. 1



The latest known Qatabanian series are pieces, sometimes slightly scyphate, with two male heads, most likely the king's portraits, on the obverse and, smaller, on the reverse. The reverse bears round the top the name of the ruler who struck the coins, the name of the royal residence and royal mint Harib in the exergue, and sometimes different monograms, letters and symbols. The following kings' names are known from the coins' legends: Yada'ab Yanūf (*yd'ab ynf*), Shahr Hilāl (*s'hr hll*), Dhama'alī Dhubayan (*dmr'ly*

dbyn), Waraw'il Gaylan (*wrw'l gyn*). Small denominations of the series show a head with curly hair on the obverse, and a smaller male head and mint-name in the exergue on the reverse. Unfortunately, it is rather hard to correlate precisely the aforementioned names with Qatabanian rulers known from the inscriptions. The weights of the late Qatabanian issues are so irregular and the number of known pieces is so small that it is hard to come to any conclusion about their standard. There is no evidence for the existence of Qatabanian copper coins.

There are three groups of coins which can be identified as Qatabano-Sabaeen and Sabaeo-Qatabanian series: they either show a combination of both Qatabanian and Sabaeen features or bear the name of a Qatabanian (?) ruler (Hill 1922, 75, pl. XI, 20).

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51 Qatabano-Sabaeen series

Qatabān

Mid-2nd century BC

Silver; unit, 4.55 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Sabaeans I, 52, no. 70

The coins were struck according to the Sabaeen weight standard. The obverse bears a male head facing to the right, with curly hair, and the reverse an owl in more upright position than on pure early Qatabanian or Sabaeen series, flanked by a pair of monograms. The image on the obverse is iconographically very close, nearly identical, to the pieces which can be tentatively identified with Yada'ab Dhūbayān Yuhargib, King of Qatabān (c. 155–135 BC), while the reverse strictly resembles certain series of Sabaeen coinage (see below), although monograms are not attested in it (Hill 1922, 52, pl. VII, 24).

AVS

52–5 Sabaeo-Qatabanian series

Saba' (?)

Late 2nd–1st centuries BC

Silver; 'old style' imitations, 5.42 g, 5.14 g;

'new style' imitations, 5.55 g, 5.50 g

The British Museum, London, BMC Sabaeans I, 53, nos 73–4; BMC Sabaeans II, 55, nos 3, 6

Both 'old style' and 'new style' (see below) Sabaeen imitation coins bear a legend in cursive script on the reverse, which was formerly identified as 'Aramaic' or 'Lihyanite'. The reading and interpretation of the legend have



raised many questions and prompted extensive study. Generally it is identified as the name of a Qatabanian king, a certain Shahr Hilal, but there is no understandable reason why the Qatabanian royal name was written on Sabaeen coins and in such a script. 'Aramaic' or 'Lihyanite' was used, probably, in order to facilitate trade with the people who were accustomed to it (but those people were definitely not Sabaeans).

In any case, we may suggest that the existence of both series – with Sabaeen typological features but with the portrait of a Qatabanian ruler on the obverse, and with the name of a Qatabanian king on the reverse of Sabaeen coins – reflects some form of political subordination or suzerainty of the South Arabian kingdoms when Qatabān dominated a large part of south-west Arabia (Hill 1922, 53–5, pls VII, 27–8; VIII, 3–4).

AVS

Coinage of Saba'

56–8 Imitations of Athenian coins of the 'old style'

Saba'

Mid-4th to mid-2nd centuries BC

Silver; unit with letter *n* on the obverse, 5.37 g;
half with letter *g* on the obverse, 2.25 g;
quarter with letter *t* on the obverse, 1.21 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Sabaeans I, 49, 46, 51, nos 41, 13, 66

Sabaeen coinage is characterised by four different typological series, of which three show both Athenian and Roman influences in their iconography. The oldest series can be considered an accurate imitation of the Attic coins of the so-called 'old style', although smaller than the Qatabanian ones. The Sabaeen letters on the obverse distinguished coin values. There are more characteristic features on the reverse of the oldest Sabaeen coins: the appearance of two symbols indicating the political and religious power of the Sabaeen *mukarribis* of the fifth to fourth centuries BC, as well as different South Arabian monograms, sometimes in pairs, of which the specific relation to coins is not yet clear, as they might be considered as mint-names or signs of magistrates (Hill 1922, 49–51, pl. VII, 15, 5, 23).

AVS

59–63 Imitations of Athenian coins of the 'new style' series with 'Arab' head

Saba'

Mid-2nd–late 1st centuries BC

Gold, silver: units with letter *n* on the reverse,

5.51 g, 5.48 g, 5.40 g; halves with letter *g* on

the reverse, 2.85 g, 2.71 g

The British Museum, London,

BMC Sabaeans II, 54, 57–8, nos 1, 14, 16, 18, 19

The 'Sabaeen owls' were minted from the second half of the fourth to the mid-second centuries BC, and then were replaced by a completely new series imitating the 'new style' Athenian coinage which had begun to appear in the 160s BC. The flan of the new coins was larger and thinner than the previous ones. The obverse bears a beardless male head with what is called the 'South Arabian hair-style' and wears a diadem. This might be the representation of a king or a god. It is quite probable that the image on the obverse was influenced by the well-known representation of Apollo's head on Egyptian seals of the second century BC. The reverse shows an owl sitting on a lying amphora as on Attic coins of the 'new style'. A value-mark, two South Arabian monograms, the pseudo-Greek legend ΑΘΕ with wrongly rendered characters (one can presume that the inscription has lost its real meaning and become a purely decorative one), and the symbol of 'Almaqah accompany it (Hill 1922, 54–9, pl. VIII, 1, 11; IX, 1–3).

AVS

64–8 Imitations of Athenian coins of the 'new style' series with 'Augustan' head

Saba'

Late 1st century BC–early 1st century AD

Silver: units with letter *n* on the reverse,

5.55 g, 5.41 g; halves with letter *g* on

the reverse, 2.80 g, 2.75 g; quarter, 1.28 g

The British Museum, London, BMC Sabaeans II,

61, 60, 62–3, nos 34, 32, 40, 41, 46

The last series of Sabaeen imitations shows Roman influence, obviously reflecting the establishment of close commercial and political ties between the Roman Empire and the Sabaeen kingdom. A portrait very similar to that of the Roman Emperor Augustus or one of his successors now replaced the obverse male head with 'South Arabian hair-style'. The reverse still bears an owl sitting on the amphora, associated with pairs of South Arabian monograms and symbol of 'Almaqah. It has been suggested that the minting of



these coins might have been triggered by the military campaign of Aelius Gallus against Arabia Felix in 26/25 BC, indicating the Roman penetration of the region. The coins are limited in numbers and could be dated to the period immediately following the event.

It appears that Sabaeen coinage with an owl on the reverse was minted until the early first century AD when the kingdom was absorbed into a new state whose rulers bore the title 'kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān' and struck the coins described below as Himyarite coinage (Hill 1922, 60–63, pl. X, 3, 1, 7, 8, 10). AVS

69–70 Series with bucranium

Saba'

Early 2nd–mid-3rd centuries AD

Silver; units, 2.79, 3.57 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Sabaeans III, 64, nos 6, 7



The revival of an independent Sabaeen state in the early second century AD is reflected by the introduction of a new type of coinage characterised by strictly indigenous elements – the so-called series with bucranium. The obverse now shows a beardless male head with 'South Arabian hair-style', rather similar to the portrait on the previous series, flanked by two symbols of Sabaeen deities, 'Almaqah and 'Athtar. The reverse bears a bucranium, or bull's head, with long lyre-shaped horns and a plume between them, probably an animal manifestation of 'Almaqah, flanked by a monogram and symbol of Awwām temple, the principal Sabaeen temple in the Mārib oasis devoted to the 'federal' deity. According to stratified coin finds from Qāni', coins of the series with bucranium circulated until the end of the kingdom in the mid-third century AD.

Since the publication of Kubitschek (1899) and Hill (1922), its weight standard has generally been assumed to be rather similar, if not identical, to one which was common in

Persia and Asia Minor, and was based on a unit of 5.6 g. We can suppose that such a standard was close to the local Sabaeen weight system. In addition, there is evidence for the existence of gold and copper issues of Sabaeen imitations of the 'new style'. The weights of the coins of the series with bucranium are very irregular, ranging, according to Hill, from 0.30 g to 3.63 g. It gives no clear idea of a fixed standard but can perhaps be related to the weight of the Roman denarius under the Emperor Nero. Both silver and copper fractions of the series with bucranium were minted (Hill 1922, 64–7, pls X, 13–14). AVS

Coinage of Ḥaḍramawt

71–73 Imitations of Athenian coins of the 'old style'

Ḥaḍramawt

Mid-4th–2nd centuries BC

Silver; units with letter *n* on the obverse, 5.30 g;
quarters with letter *g* on the obverse, 1.28 g;
eighths with letter *s*² on the obverse, 0.46 g

The British Museum, London,
BMC Sabaeans I, 46–7, nos 6, 16, 23



As in other South Arabian states the first coins minted and in circulation in Ḥaḍramawt were imitations using Athenian tetradrachms as models. Pieces of the so-called 'series a', according to Hill's classification, might be considered as the earliest examples imitating, probably, Attic coins from the mid- to late fourth century BC. 'Hadrami owls' were minted in silver and copper in several denominations following, as in Sabaeen coinage, the local weight standard, with the highest denomination close to 5.6 g. The Hadrami letters *n*, *g*, *t* and *s*² were placed,

usually reversed, on Athena's cheek to distinguish coin values of a whole, half, quarter and eighth denominations (it seems there were no copper coins with the letter *g* as a value-mark). Doubtless the copper coins were struck using the same dies as the silver pieces. It seems that the early Ḥaḍramawt imitations were minted for a relatively lengthy period of time: while the earliest samples show a very accurate legend and faithful style of image, comparable to the Greek models, the later issues bear images with various degrees of debasement in the legend and representations, until one can barely recognise Athena's head on the obverse, and a crude outline of the owl with traces of the first and last letters of the pseudo-Greek legend on the reverse.

The early Ḥaḍramawt imitations were replaced by another type of coinage, the obverse of which bears a male (?) head facing right instead of the head of a Greek goddess. The reverse still shows an owl facing left or right, but the pseudo-Greek legend is replaced by a Hadrami one with the name of Shaqār (*s*²*qr*), the name of the royal residence in Shabwa, denoting, most probably, the royal mint as well. The coins of these series were minted in the late second to first centuries BC (Hill 1922, 46–7, pl. VII, 4, 6, 8; Sedov 1998, 21–35). AVS

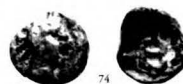
74 Series with caduceus

Ḥaḍramawt, coinage of Sumhuram

c. late 1st century BC–early 1st century AD

Copper, 2.13–1.45 g

The British Museum, London, CM 1951-2-1,5



Around the late first century BC the appearance of Ḥaḍramawt coinage completely changed, probably under the influence of the late Hellenistic Mediterranean coinage. A radiate male (?) head appears on the obverse, perhaps representing a Hadrami solar or lunar deity (compare the representation of Helios in Hellenistic coinage). The reverse shows a winged caduceus, the symbol of the god of trade in Greek and Roman mythology, accompanied by the name of Shaqār and a monogram, which can be deciphered as Sumhuram (*s*²*mhrm*), probably the name of a local ruler (Sedov 1998, 70–75). AVS



75



76



75–9 Series with eagle

Ḥaḍramawt, coinage of Yashhur'il Yuhar'ish, son of Abiyasa', *mukarrib* of Ḥaḍramawt

c. first half of 1st century AD

Copper; large 20.57–54.22 g; medium 3.24 g, 3.41 g; small 1.74 g denominations

The British Museum, London,

CM 1937-12-12,3; 1937-12-12,4; 1936-12-21,9;

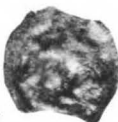
1936-12-21,12; 1936-12-21,7

Around the early first century AD, Yashhur'il Yuhar'ish, son of Abiyasa', *mukarrib* of Ḥaḍramawt, started a completely new type of coinage. It is the well-known series with the male head facing right (most probably the portrait of the *mukarrib*), a big letter *m* (reversed) and the name of the 'federal' deity Sayin (*s'yn*) on the obverse, and an eagle with open wings (undoubtedly the manifestation of Sayin), and two names, Shaqār and Yash(a)h (*ys'h* = initial letters of the first ruler's name), on the reverse. These coins were cast in a mould; they were acquired by Freya Stark between Shihr and Tarim. They vary in size and their value presumably depended on the weight of the coin, as three denominations can be distinguished (Walker 1937, pl. XXXIII, 1–7; Sedov 1998, 75–9).

AVS



77



78



79



80



80 Square coinage

Ḥaḍramawt

1st–4th centuries AD

Copper, 2.27 g

The British Museum, London, CM 1951-2-1,6

The appearance of the most common type of Ḥaḍramawt coinage – small, square copper coins with the name of Shaqār on the obverse, and a bull's head and name of Sayin on the reverse – could also be associated with Yashhur'il Yuhar'ish, son of Abiyasa', *mukarrib* of Ḥaḍramawt. According to the finds from controlled excavations the square coins were minted and circulated for a considerable period, until at least the late fourth century AD (Walker 1952, fig. 5; Sedov 1998, 78–9).

AVS



81



82



81–2 Series with bull

Ḥaḍramawt

Different rulers of the late 1st–late 3rd centuries AD

Copper, 1.83 g, 7.18 g

The British Museum, London,

CM 1951-2-1,7; 1951-2-1,1

Yashhur'il Yuhar'ish, son of Abiyasa', *mukarrib* of Ḥaḍramawt, also introduced another

type of Ḥaḍramawt coinage, with a bull standing to the right and two names, Shaqār and Sayīn, in the legend on the reverse. There is plenty of evidence that a bull was the animal manifestation of Sayīn, the 'federal' deity of Ḥaḍramawt. The obverse of the coins of this series bears either the name of Shaqār in a square frame, or a radiate or diademed male head sometimes within a circular border. The stratified coins excavated at Qānī, as well as tentative deciphering of the obverse and reverse monograms, allow us to associate the series with a bull on the reverse with various Ḥaḍramawt kings ruling in the late first to late third centuries AD. The monograms seem to denote rulers' names, like 'Ilī'adh Yalut, son of Yada'il, King of Ḥaḍramawt (c. mid-first century AD), 'Ilī'adh Yalūt, son of Ammidhakhkar, King of Ḥaḍramawt (AD 200–20?), Yada'il Bayān, son of Rabbishams (c. AD 240–60?). It seems that Ḥaḍramawt royal coinage came to an end around the last quarter of the third century AD, but undoubtedly pieces continued to circulate in the territory of the former independent kingdom during the fourth and even early fifth centuries AD (Walker 1952, 623–6, figs 2, 4; Sedov 1998, 81–2). AVS

Coinage of Ḥimyar

The Ḥimyarite kingdom seems to have started minting its coins in the late second century BC, copying details of the contemporary Qatabanian series with male head and curly hair on the obverse and male head with chignon on the reverse. Only a few differences must be pointed out: the name of Raydān (*rydn*) in the exergue on the reverse, denoting the royal mint, monograms and symbols, which differs from the Qatabanian series, and the 'Arabised' style of the head with chignon. The year 115 BC or, alternatively, 110 BC may have marked not only the beginning of the so-called Ḥimyarite era but also a starting point for the new coinage.

83–7 Series with two heads

Ḥimyar

Coinage of different rulers of the 1st–2nd centuries AD
Silver, 1.47–1.82 g

The British Museum, London, BMC Sabaeans IV, 68, no. 1; 69, no. 1; 70, no. 2; 71, no. 2; 73, no. 1.

Rather soon, and again as in Qatabān, the early Ḥimyarite series were replaced by a 'series with two heads'. The obverse displays a beardless male head with 'South Arabian hair-style', probably the king's portrait (sometimes accompanied by a monogram). The reverse shows a similar but smaller head supplemented by the name of Raydān (*rydn*) in the exergue, the king's name around the top, and another monogram and/or a kind of symbol of the ruling dynasty on either side. The following kings' names are known from the coins' legends: Karib'il Yuhan'im (*krb'l yhn'm*), 'Amdān Yuhaqbiḍ (*'mdn yhqbd*), 'Amdān Bayān (*'mdn byn*), Shamnar Yuhan'im (*s'mnr yhn'm*), and Tha'rān Ya'ūb (*s'm y'b*). The coins of smaller denominations sometimes show a monogram instead of a head on the obverse, and a shortened king's or mint-name Ya'ūb (*y'b*), Watār (*wtr*) or Na'am (*n'm*) in the exergue on the reverse. Ḥimyarite pieces, unlike the Qatabanian ones, are usually very scyphate.

Almost all names occurring in the coin legends can be related to Ḥimyarite rulers of the first and second centuries AD, known from the South Arabian inscriptions. It is quite certain, for instance, that coins with the names of 'Amdān Yuhaqbiḍ and 'Amdān Bayān were struck by one person, namely 'Amdān Bayān Yuhaqbiḍ, King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān (c. AD 80–100). On the other hand, these coins are very numerous, and



this fact may indeed indicate that they enjoyed a high popularity without any iconographic changes during the reigns of several Ḥimyarite rulers of the second century AD. Coins with the name of Tha'rān Ya'ūb are associated with Tha'rān Ya'ūb, King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, who probably reigned in the late second or early third centuries AD. It appears that these pieces were the latest in the Ḥimyarite 'pre-Imperial' coinage bearing the king's name (Hill 1922, 68–74, pl. XI, 1, 3, 7, 11, 16). AVS

Before Sheba

CHRISTOPHER EDENS

Proper archaeological site survey and excavation in Yemen began only in the 1920s and continued sporadically into the 1970s. Since then a significant burst of research has started making up for lost time. The earlier archaeological research had focused on the glories of Arabia Felix – the temples, cemeteries, palaces, town walls, dams and irrigation systems, and inscriptions of Saba' and her sister kingdoms – and although the focus of research recently has widened considerably, the lures of a great civilisation remain irresistible to many. All well and good, except that the seduction of monumental buildings, rich art and informative inscriptions helped distort perceptions of Yemen's prehistory. Until 1981 archaeologists could point to sites in the immense span of human prehistory up to 4000 BC and to other sites after 1000 BC, but could identify no prehistoric culture to fit into the intervening gap. Yet during these missing three millennia the occupants of Yemen had transformed from wandering groups of hunters or animal herders into complex societies with towns, elaborate writing systems and the other marks of civilisation.

Earlier scholars troubled by the gap proposed several explanations for it. In one view a Neolithic way of life had extended far longer in Yemen than in other parts of the Near East, and the South Arabian civilisation was the creation of immigrants from the north who displaced the backward natives. An alternative account supposed that archaeologists had simply not looked hard enough for the missing evidence, which might be buried beneath later towns or under metres of accumulated irrigation silts. As is usually the case with such mutually exclusive and simplistic options, the reality proved to be far more complicated. Now two decades after the initial discoveries of 1981 the picture of Yemen's prehistory is much changed: the region held multiple prehistoric cultures that expressed several different basic ways of life during the fourth to second millennia BC. Most of the newly discovered sites are in

topographic settings and districts to which archaeologists had previously paid little attention. Mistaken identity also played its role, for archaeologists had described some prehistoric sites but had incorrectly dated them. Some South Arabian towns do in fact cover pre-first-millennium BC occupations, and irrigation silts have buried villages. Even the proposition of an extended Neolithic era may not be completely wrong for some portions of the region.

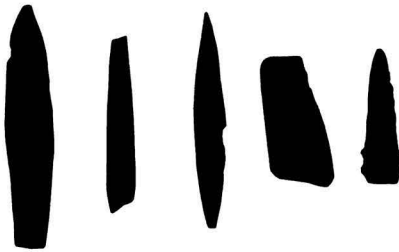
Many archaeologists refer collectively to the newly discovered cultures as Bronze Age. If understood literally, this term is inappropriate: with several spectacular exceptions the sites have presented few pieces of metal, and these are basically unalloyed copper. The term does make more sense as chronological shorthand, for further north in the Near East the Bronze Age runs from c. 3500 BC until 1200 BC. Others prefer the label post-Neolithic, arguing that cultures without bronze do not make a Bronze Age. But strictly speaking, today we are still in a 'post-Neolithic' period, and mismatches between technological labels and archaeological reality are in fact common. Since the term is already embedded in archaeological discussions we will continue to refer to the Bronze Age of Yemen while keeping firmly in mind the label's somewhat arbitrary nature.

NEOLITHIC ANTECEDENTS

Now-dry lake beds, buried humic soil, fossil springs, and other evidence attest to climatic conditions during 10,000–4/3000 BC being moister than today throughout Arabia, the result of a stronger and more northerly monsoon system. Human groups took advantage of the resulting circumstances, and traces of their presence regularly occur even under the harshest conditions of the ar-Rub' al-Khālī.¹ These groups employed distinctive chipped-stone tools, changes of which offer a rough gauge of time, but they lacked pottery (fig. 23). The people occupying Yemen during these milder

times pursued variations on a mobile way of life, moving across the landscape according to the seasonal opportunities which nature provided. At first these groups relied entirely on gathering wild plants and hunting animals, and along the coast fishing and collecting shellfish. Some groups added herds of domestic animals – cattle along with some sheep and goats – to their economic base, perhaps as early as 6000 BC and more assuredly by 5000–4500 BC, roughly the same time that these animals also appeared in other parts of Arabia. The source for these animal stocks is not yet known, and in the case of Yemen might have been East Africa. Agriculture remains an open question. Grinding stones are common on Neolithic sites but

FIG. 23 Chipped stone points from Meha.
(Photo: J. Zarins)



these can be used for wild foods and other purposes and so only raise the possibility of farming. More suggestive of agriculture are several dams in Ḥaḍramawt, tentatively assigned to 4400 BC or older, and a possible relict agricultural terrace wall in the western highlands which dates to 3800 BC. But even if some groups were farming they still remained seasonally mobile. The archaeological remains of these nomadic groups are not impressive: scatters of stone tools at lake margins or on hilltops commanding the surrounding countryside; shell middens adjacent to former shorelines; and tiny settlements of oval huts with stone foundations and organic superstructures.

By 3200 BC the Bronze Age of Yemen was emerging, a change most conveniently identified by the appearance of pottery but one also marked by the growth of settlements into large and elaborate villages and eventually towns, development of ever more sophisticated agricultural systems, and an occasional use of copper. These elements did not emerge simultaneously or quickly, nor did all the elements appear together in different parts of Yemen: south-west Arabia came to host several very different ways of life. The shifts away from the previous Neolithic condition came in the face of a strong drying trend as the monsoon system weakened and moved southward, progressively affecting first the deep northern deserts (c. 5000 BC) and last the south-western highlands (c. 3000 BC). Climate change

altered the regional landscape of economic possibilities, obliging communities gradually to seek alternative solutions to the issue of feeding themselves.

WESTERN HIGHLANDS AND DESERT FRINGE

The discovery in 1981 of the Yemeni Bronze Age occurred in Khawlān (a highland district east of Ṣanaʿa) when archaeologists found small settlements with a hitherto unknown kind of pottery. Another team has since worked on similar sites in Dhamār to the south while explorations along the desert fringe to the north-east show that groups with a similar material culture occupied the wādī systems at the lower elevations which later hosted the classic South Arabian kingdoms. The sites of this Bronze Age culture thus appear in diverse environments ranging from relatively wet plains and valleys at 2,500 m above sea level where rain-fed agriculture is reliable, to wādīs at 1,100 m above sea level in the arid desert fringe where farming requires irrigation.

The Bronze Age culture of the central western highlands presents several different basic configurations and many local variations of style. In the drier areas along the east, Khawlān for example, settlements typically are one or more circular compounds formed by a chain of elongated rooms enclosing a central open space.² The rooms are slightly sunk into the ground and framed with low flimsy walls of stone slabs set on edge which act as foundations for roofing of organic materials, supported by one or two pillars inside the rooms. These settlements are small, never exceeding one hectare in area and containing perhaps fifty to a hundred people. This kind of settlement may be seen as an elaboration of the architecture typical of the Neolithic period in Yemen, and in Khawlān at least seems to have disappeared after 1900 BC. In contrast, the Bronze Age sites of Dhamār are often substantial settlements covering up to five or six hectares. At Hammar al-Qa, the best-documented settlement of this kind, rectilinear houses of one or several rooms are arranged in blocks along streets, the settlement of 400–500 people enclosed by a town wall with gates (figs 24–5).³ In most cases houses are constructed in a manner similar to those of Khawlān, but in some places more substantial coursed walls are present. Hayd Suad, a site dated to 2800–2600 BC, offers a spectacular example in which house walls are built of massive stones laid in courses and still standing over 2 m high. The dated sites in Dhamār range from 2800 to 1200 BC, becoming larger and organisationally more complex through time.

The highland communities relied on different mixes of farming, herding and foraging for their livelihood. Imprints of grains in pottery as well as the charred

FIG. 24 The Bronze Age site of Hammat al-Qa on the summit.
(Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

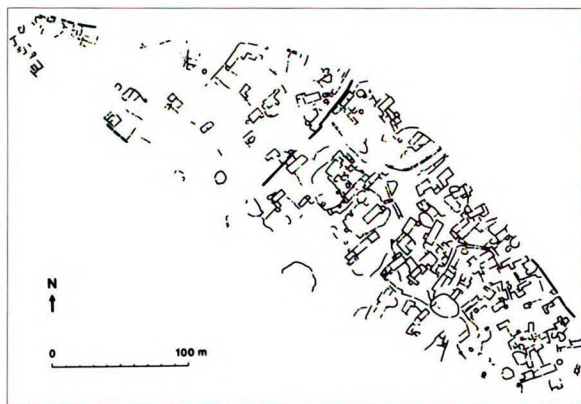


FIG. 25 Plan of the architecture at Hammat al-Qa.

grains themselves record cultivation of wheat and barley, along with lesser amounts of sorghum and millet (neither of the latter two cereals are definitively identified), on terraced fields in Dhamār and on fields irrigated with simple check dams in Khawlān. Sheep and goats were by far the most common herd animals, with the Dhamār communities keeping cattle in greater numbers than did the groups in Khawlān. Hunting wild animals, and presumably collecting wild plants, made a minor contribution to diets in Khawlān but thus far has not been detected in Dhamār. The stylistic variability of pottery and other objects throughout the highlands – pottery from sites just 20 km apart may be appreciably different in their details – suggests that highland communities operated within effective social and economic networks of small size. Other evidence points in the same direction.

Exotic materials are noticeably rare, amounting to a handful of things made from marine shell, carnelian, chalcedony and copper. Obsidian flows in the Dhamār area provide the main material for chipped-stone tools immediately around each flow, but communities just 20–30 km away relied heavily on local materials.

In the drier desert fringe to the north-east the configuration of Bronze Age sites generally follows the Khawlān pattern, although the nature of prehistoric occupations beneath later sites like Mārib remains unclear. So far none of these sites has been excavated or firmly dated, but the pottery collected from the surface of these sites shows strong resemblance to the Khawlān material while others date as late as 1300 BC.⁴ At Shabwa the remains of the later South Arabian city cover a Bronze Age settlement of mudbrick structures dated as early as 2000 BC, but the pottery from these early levels bears little resemblance to the Bronze Age ceramics in the Jawf or the western highlands.⁵ Evidently, yet another family of Bronze Age sites exists in western Ḥaḍramawt. The economic bases of communities throughout the desert fringe remain largely speculative, but some evidence implies that the irrigation systems for which southern Arabia was later famous had a third-millennium origin, while the location of other sites strongly suggests a heavy investment in animal herding.⁶

WESTERN COASTAL PLAIN

The western coastal Bronze Age is best known from two sites, Sabr in Lahj and Sihi in south-west Saudi Arabia, both dating to 1400–900/800 BC. Sihi is merely a 60-cm-thick deposit of shell, ash and cultural debris upon a beach ridge without evident architecture, effectively a rubbish dump. Similar middens



FIG. 26 The north-west corner and entrance of the monumental building Sabr 5 with the 'Burnt Building' 3 in the foreground, 12th–9th centuries BC. (Photo: B. Vogt)

appear through the Tihāma and the Aden area. Sabr by contrast is a vast settlement, at least 1×2 km in extent with stratigraphy up to 5 m deep, and divided into zones with different styles of architecture (fig. 26).⁷ In the town centre dwellings were rectangular mudbrick structures of varying size, sometimes with an inner courtyard, while houses at the edge of town were simple round one-room affairs made entirely of organic materials (represented by post holes), perhaps similar to the African-style architecture found in Tihāma today. Other sections of the town were industrial, devoted to pottery-making, metalworking and bead-making. The social centre of the town was a large walled compound (covering over 55×75 m) enclosing spacious courtyards and at least three buildings with pillared halls; one of these buildings may have been a temple with attached storerooms (one of which held over 150 storage jars filled with grain and nuts, and also a piece of worked elephant tusk), while the others were more residential in nature. Despite their obvious sociological differences, Sihi and Sabr, and other sites of this culture, share important features such as making human and animal figurines as well as distinctive pottery from clay, using stone (including obsidian) for much of their basic equipment, but also fashioning tools such as awls, knives, fish hooks and needles from copper. The inhabitants of both places relied heavily on the sea for food, to which the people of Sabr added a strong irrigation agricultural sector and those of Sihi herding.

Recent work has begun to uncover the antecedents of this late second-millennium-BC culture, at least in Lahj. Several deep soundings at Sabr hit earlier levels where the pottery presents some distinctive characteristics which the excavators place in the late third

millennium/early second millennium BC. This same pottery typifies several other sites in Lahj including Ma'leiba, where excavation has uncovered traces of an irrigation canal among other remains. Shell middens in the area seem to contain even older phases, probably extending towards the beginning of the third millennium BC. It is very likely that large and complex settlements also existed during much of the third millennium BC and perhaps earlier, especially in Lahj where the combination of high agricultural potential and rich maritime resources provided a strong foundation for the early emergence of social complexity.

The western coastal Bronze Age encompasses a third kind of site, megalithic in character and ceremonial in function. At Hajar al-Ghaymah in Tihāma, massive stone pillars were erected in lines up to 50 m long, the pillars up to 3 m above the ground and spaced roughly a metre apart.⁸ This site has not been carefully studied, but the similar if less imposing monuments at al-Midaman have. Here, most of the pillars of granite and basalt have fallen or have been reused in later buildings so their original arrangements are often difficult to perceive but the pillars seem to form discrete clusters. The makers of the Midaman monuments had hauled the pillars, up to 7 m long and 20 tons in weight, at least 50 km from the nearest sources of these stones. Excavation revealed a buried infant, or in one case an adult, beneath individual pillars or former locations of pillars. Beneath another pillar was a cache of eleven copper tools and weapons grouped around a heavy cube of obsidian. The shape of some tools suggests a late third-millennium-BC date for this ceremonial phase of the site.⁹

ḤAḌRAMAWT AND MAHRA

East of Yemen's mountain spine developments during the third and second millennia BC remain somewhat enigmatic, involving several intertwined themes that spill over into the two regions already considered. Aside from Shabwa at the western edge of Ḥaḍramawt, the residential sites in the east retained an essentially Neolithic character: circular hut foundations with an aceramic material culture. Shi'b Munayder in the uplands south of the Wādi Ḥaḍramawt is one of the few investigated eastern settlements. Here circular single-room hut foundations are spaced out nearly a kilometre along a wādi terrace, intermingled with remains from other periods; the Bronze Age huts were first in use in 1500–1400 BC.¹⁰ The economic basis of this community remains uncertain, but very probably its inhabitants were animal herders who occasionally engaged opportunistically in agriculture (the pattern of the area's current inhabitants).

FIG. 27 West entrance to Tomb 79 at Jabel Jidran. (Photo: Mission archéologique française Jawf-Ḥaḍramawt)



In counterpoint to their rudimentary settlements, the inhabitants of Ḥaḍramawt and Mahra constructed elaborate tombs, and very similar mortuary architecture appears in the desert fringe, parts of the western highlands (for example, Khawlān), and the desert borderlands north of the Jawf and Ḥaḍramawt.¹¹ The basic structure is a circular stone tomb built above ground, constructed as a concentric double wall enclosing a rubble or cobble fill. The inner wall forms the tomb chamber which is often roofed with courses of slabs fixed at one end in the rubble fill and set obliquely over the chamber to support a horizontal cap stone in a quasi-corbelled fashion (fig. 27). The tombs in Ḥaḍramawt and Mahra are relatively small (usually 2–5 m across, up to 1.5 m high), lack doorways and almost always contain a single burial. They sometimes incorporate into the outer wall stone stelae up to 1.5 m tall and decorated with a human figure wearing a short sword with a lunate pommel. Tombs in the Jawf and adjoining districts are often more elegant structures: flat-topped, tapered towers 2.5–3.5 m high and furnished with a doorway. Designed for repeated use, these tombs usually contain multiple burials and some hold remains from periods long after the Bronze Age. Wherever they appear, the tombs are often equipped with a ‘tail’ – a linear array of small tombs, small piles of stones, small box platforms with or without a pillar fixed in each platform, continuous double curbing filled with stones, and other structures extending tens or even hundreds of metres from the main tomb (fig.

28). Free-standing pillars are erected near some tombs from the Jawf to Dhofar, or appear as solitary structures. Although seeming not as complex as the pillar sites in Tihāma, they nevertheless form a common aspect of ceremonial life across Yemen.

Most tombs have long since been looted but some still retain some of their original contents, mostly beads and other ornaments, but also in some cases food offerings (represented by sheep bones), pottery, metals, and chipped-stone or bone tools. The character of the tombs themselves, plus the style of some of the goods in them, have suggested a broad date between the fourth or even fifth millennium and the second millennium BC. Recent exploration of tombs at Jabal Ruwaiq and Jabal Jidran north-east of Mārib have produced radiocarbon evidence which firmly fixes most of these burials at 2900–2700 BC, with others around 1700–1500 BC (fig. 61).¹² Other tombs in the Jawf were constructed over an existing Bronze Age settlement, and therefore belong to a time following the presumed third–early second-millennium BC date of the settlement. The swords with lunate pommels shown on the stelae in the east bear a remarkable resemblance to a weapon style dated to 2600–1800 BC in Mesopotamia and Syro-Palestine.¹³ And the use (if not also construction) of tombs sometimes continued well into the period of the South Arabian kingdoms, as is most evident at Makhdarah near Ṣirwāḥ.¹⁴ In the most conservative estimation, therefore, the regional mortuary complex belongs to

the Bronze Age but it may well have already existed during the Neolithic period.

The regional distribution of this mortuary complex incorporates areas which hosted a ceramic Bronze Age culture (for example, Khawlān and the Jawf) as well as a wider region that seemingly did not: these mortuary

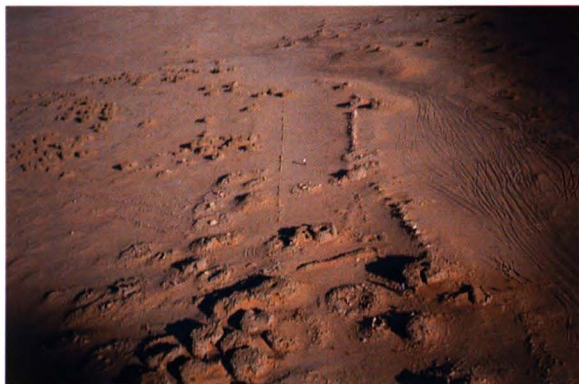


FIG. 28 View to the east of the tombs on the central hill at Jabal Jidran.
(Photo: Y. Guichard)

customs cut across such distinctions. Although pottery does sometimes appear among grave goods, it is rare. The earliest tombs at Ruwaiq and Jidran provide the richest body of pottery, differing in character from that of settlements in Jawf and elsewhere in Yemen. Moreover, the mortuary complex seems not to appear in the wetter portions of the highlands nor along the western coastal plain (leaving aside the pillar monuments) where agricultural village life took root at an early stage, but instead flourished among groups in far more arid regions with more weakly developed village traditions or with an outright pastoralist subsistence base. The mortuary complex may thus be seen as the ceremonial focus of nomadic pastoral groups in south-west Arabia: the tomb was analogous to the house and village among agricultural communities as the architectural container and expression of social identity.

THE WIDER PERSPECTIVE

The Bronze Age of Yemen encompassed diverse paths and tempos of development. Starting from essentially the same Neolithic background as the rest of Yemen, the Bronze Age groups of the western highlands initially set the pace for emerging social complexity and town life. But this initiative stalled, overtaken during the second millennium by developments at places like Sabr on the coast and by the initial formation of the South Arabian culture towards the end of the second millennium. One factor behind these divergent paths is landscape and agricultural regime. The wetter condi-

tions of the highlands encouraged small, dispersed and self-sufficient settlements and the broken terrain facilitated local autonomy and resistance to external political control. In the desert fringe, by contrast, the regime of spate water irrigation within the confines of individual wādī valleys in an arid environment made water a focused and controllable critical resource and tied agricultural populations to more concentrated settlement systems.¹⁵ The role of pastoralist groups was obviously important but more difficult to define.

Trade, specifically of incense, was a central factor in the emergence of the South Arabian states and this commerce may have its roots in the Bronze Age. Already in Neolithic times goods like obsidian and sea shells were travelling long distances, with obsidian perhaps from Yemen reaching the Gulf and Egypt. Some scholars argue for very active trade across great distances during the Bronze Age, linking Yemen ultimately with Mesopotamia and India to the east and with Egypt to the north-west.¹⁶ This idea may well be correct. But the archaeological evidence for contacts even between different parts of Yemen, much less with the wider world, remains scant, coming mostly in the form of obsidian, which found its way out of the highlands, and the (often vague) parallels in pottery and metal forms that scholars draw between Yemen and Palestine or East Africa. At the local level the overwhelming impression is one of relative isolation rather than vigorous commerce among the agricultural villagers which comprised the majority of Yemen's Bronze Age population. An important exception to this impression is the striking similarity between pastoralists' mortuary monuments across much of Arabia, a reflection of the mobility inherent to that way of life. Herders' movements may have been a vehicle for exchange, but hardly for the organised caravan traffic of later times.

The question of Bronze Age trade and interregional connections joins many other basic issues about which we still are woefully uncertain, among them the beginning of agriculture in south-west Arabia; the degree of organisational complexity (political hierarchy, social ranking, economic specialisation) achieved in various sections of the region; systems of belief; and the relationship between Bronze Age groups and the emergence of the South Arabian states. On the last point, one school of thought still holds that the South Arabian civilisation was introduced by immigrants from the north, thereby tossing the Bronze Age onto the rubbish heap of prehistory. Archaeological research is still at the stage where excavation of almost any Bronze Age site in any part of the country produces important new information. Having shown that the Bronze Age does in fact exist, the archaeologists of Yemen must now explore its significance.

Before Saba': objects from the Yemeni Bronze Age



88–90

88–90 Granite statues of standing female figures

Highlands and Mārib
3rd–2nd millennia BC

H 21.5 cm, w 9.5 cm, TH 2.3 cm;
H 24 cm, w 18 cm, TH 6 cm;
H 33 cm, w 18 cm, TH 9.5 cm

The Say'un Museum, SM 2644;
The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 12964;
The Mārib Museum, BAR 1

Stone statues of this type are often found on the surface in the Yemeni highlands and the western Ramlat as-Sab'atayn and are among the most ancient anthropomorphic depictions in South Arabia. A similar example was found *in situ* at Khawlān at-Tiyāl where Italian archaeologists discovered the first evidence for a Yemeni Bronze Age culture (de Maigret 1984; 1990). Statues of both men and women are attested and both types usually have their arms folded in front of them and an incised line at the waist. They have been interpreted as idols and may represent protectors of the dead or symbols of fecundity (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 38; Seipel ed. 1998, 141, 143). The statues are not influenced by contemporary cultures of the Near East (Antonini 2001, 29–33, pls 1–5). The heads are small in contrast with later South Arabian sculpture where heads are pro-

portionately larger. The line across the breast in some of the statues is probably representative of a sash or clothing and is also found in later art; a similar unpublished stone statue of a woman with a sash is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (1998.380).

91 Limestone stela representing a bearded warrior

Possibly Wādī al-Muḥammadiyyin, Ḥaḍramawt
Late 3rd–early 2nd millennia BC

H 70 cm, w 32 cm, TH 9 cm
The Mukalla Museum, MuM 249

These warrior stelae were used as funerary monuments and have thus far only been found in the Mahra governorate and in the Jawl in the Ḥaḍramawt. They are found alone, in pairs or in groups. The limestone stela is sometimes shaped like the human form or sculpted in low relief and crudely incised. Among the anthropomorphic depictions, only statues of males have been found, with only the upper half of the body, as the base was buried in the sand. The spine is sometimes marked on the back of the stela and this form of stela formed the prototype for sculptures in the round (Seipel ed. 1998, 138). Daggers with exaggerated crescentic



91

pommels are usually shown; the blades of daggers with riveted wooden handles have been excavated in contemporary graves in Yemen (see cats 92–6).

92–6 Bronze daggers

Bayt al-Mujali, Madinat Baha'is
Second half of 3rd millennium BC

L 18 cm, w 3 cm; L 15.7 cm, w 3.7 cm;
L 17.7 cm, w 2.8 cm; L 24.6 cm, w 3.2 cm;
L 21.5 cm, w 3 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a',
YM 9065, 9062, 9064, 9066, 9068

Exactly when metalworking started in southern Arabia is unclear but the technology seems to have been present by the late third millennium BC, as attested by the representations of metal daggers with crescentic pommels on the warrior stelae from the southern Jawl (cat. 91) and a small number of metal objects found in graves. Although the location of indigenous ore deposits has not yet been fully investigated there are numerous sources of copper in the highlands, which are known to have been worked in antiquity (Overstreet *et al.* 1988, 411). The dagger blades displayed here are very similar to two copper daggers with double rivets from the megalithic cemetery of al-Midaman on the Red Sea coast

(Keall 1998; Giumlia-Mair *et al.* 1999, 40). They also have a striking similarity to grave finds from Palestine, where they date to the transitional phase from the Early to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 2300–2000 BC).

97–8 An instrument with many spouts and a fenestrated vessel

Sabr, courtyard south of Building 5C

Beginning of the 1st millennium BC

H 27.5 cm, D 38 cm; H 22.5 cm, D 41 cm

The Hawta Museum, S5C L68 V2; S5C L60 V39

These handmade vessels were discovered in the courtyard south of Building 5C at Sabr. The fenestrated vessel may have been used for the burning of incense or other aromatics, although the function of the other is difficult to determine. Sabr is a very extensive Bronze Age settlement situated approximately 25 km north of Aden, near the town of Lahj. R.A.B. Hamilton (1943) was the first to describe the site in an archaeological survey of the area. B. Doe (1961; 1971, 137–41) conducted a small sounding at Sabr and published some pottery, and G.L. Harding (1964) also published a collection of surface pottery from the site. B. Vogt and A.V. Sedov of the German Archaeological Institute (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut Ṣana'a') and the Institute of Oriental Studies (Russian Academy of Sciences), in collaboration with the General Organisation for Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts, commenced extensive excavations at Sabr in 1994 (Vogt and Sedov 1998). Substantial architectural remains have been excavated in the uppermost layers, which have been radiocarbon-dated to between the fourteenth and the early ninth centuries BC. There are an additional 3 m of cultural deposits, the earliest phases of which are believed to date to the late third to early second millennia BC (see this volume, Chapter 5).

The largest and most important structure on the site, Building 5C, has been interpreted as a sanctuary. This building was part of a massive monumental complex of mudbrick buildings and courtyards separated from the rest of the settlement by a wall. The sanctuary is almost square in plan and comprises a large pillared hall divided into three naves and a



92–6



97–8

forecourt with a rectangular platform flanked by pillared galleries. The portico was supported by three wooden columns from which a set of steps led to the platform. Many ceramic vessels were discovered in Building 5C, including about 150 vessels in a storage area, some of which were empty and piled upside down on top of each other whereas others were found filled with organic remains.

There is considerable evidence to indicate that settlement at Sabr came to a brutal end; precious possessions were left behind, many buildings were destroyed and the village and sanctuary were burned. This destruction in the early ninth century BC may have been due to the expansion of one of the first South Arabian highland kingdoms (Vogt and Sedov 1997).

Trade, Incense and Perfume

NIGEL GROOM

The chief products of Arabia are frankincense and myrrh.

(Pliny 12)

In about 450 BC the Greek historian Herodotus wrote that 'Arabia is the only place that produces frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and the gum called *ledanon* . . . the whole country exhales a more than earthly fragrance', supplementing this information with notes about the problems the Arabs had in collecting these materials.¹ He also recorded that the Persian Emperor Darius (521–486 BC), whose writ then extended as far as Egypt, was receiving 1,000 Babylonian talents in weight, or nearly 25 tons, of frankincense annually from the Arabs as a 'voluntary tribute'.² Pottery sherds with letters inscribed in the old South Arabian script, relics of merchants from South Arabia, have been found near Aqaba and possibly date to a period slightly earlier than Herodotus.³ Around 600 BC the Greek poetess Sappho referred to frankincense and myrrh in her verses.⁴ There seems no doubt then that the great trade in Arabian incense was flourishing by the time of Herodotus, and probably earlier.

How much further back the Arabian aromatics trade goes is still uncertain. In Queen Hatshepsut's temple at Deir al-Bahri near Thebes, a fresco of c. 1500 BC shows Egyptian sailors travelling in a fleet of ships to the far distant land of Punt.⁵ Much the most important commodity they collected from there was *'ntyw*, which Egyptologists translated as frankincense. Since true frankincense trees grow only in South Arabia and Somalia it was for long held that the Egyptians sailed to these places to obtain it. But scholars now discount this, believing that *'ntyw* was either an inferior form of incense obtained from another species of frankincense tree or, more probably, an inferior variety of myrrh, both of which are found in the region of present-day Eritrea. Recently it has even been proposed that the riches of Punt may have been in Uganda, reached after a long voyage up the Nile to Lake Albert.⁶

Very relevant to the problem of when the trade

began is the legendary visit to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba. As the dates of Solomon are approximately known, this would have happened in c. 950 BC and is often explained as a meeting about trading. But the Old Testament story is clouded in fable and there are reasons to doubt its validity: the earliest known South Arabian ruler for whom there is inscriptional evidence reigned over Saba' much later, in c. 800 BC; the South Arabian monarchs were invariably male; the notion that any ruler in South Arabia would have visited Jerusalem in those days is almost preposterous. There were, however, queens in North Arabia in later centuries and there are apparent references in the Old Testament to a Sabaeen people living there, from which the legend could have derived.⁷

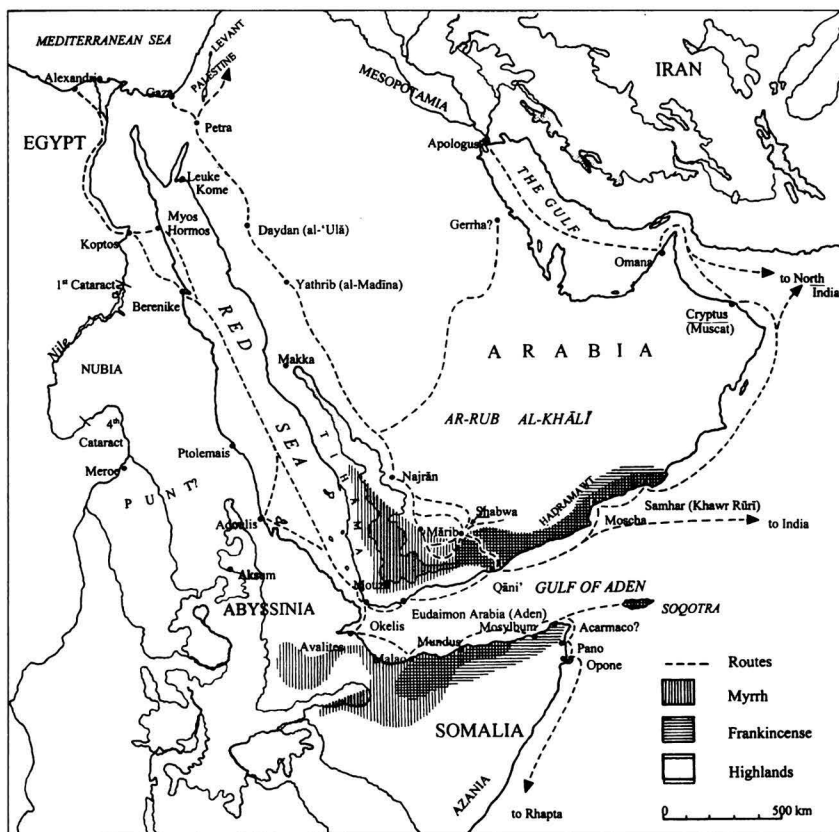
The reference in two eighth- and seventh-century royal Assyrian inscriptions to contemporary Sabaeen rulers suggests commercial contacts by that time.⁸ However, the use of frankincense as such is not apparent in Mesopotamia until some time later, and scholars have now determined that frankincense and myrrh were not used by the Israelites in their rituals before the seventh century BC.⁹ All in all we cannot therefore assert on present evidence that the trade in aromatics from South Arabia began before the end of the eighth century BC.

In c. 300 BC the Greek botanist Theophrastus provided some descriptions of the South Arabian trees which produced aromatic gums, together with the statement that they grew in Saba', Ḥaḍramawt, Qatabān and Ma'in.¹⁰

Frankincense and myrrh . . . are found in the Arabian peninsula about Saba', Ḥaḍramawt, Qatabān and Ma'in (*Mamali*). The trees of frankincense and myrrh grow partly in the mountains, partly on private estates at the foot of the mountains, wherefore some are under cultivation, others not' (Theophrastus 9.4).

This is the earliest mention in literary sources of the last three of these kingdoms, which all seceded from

FIG. 29 The incense routes of the Near East. (Drawn by A. Searight)



Saba', starting in c. 430 BC. There is further information from other classical authors, but the bulk of our knowledge of the incense trade comes from the Roman writer Pliny, mostly obtained by him from earlier sources and, in regard to the trade by sea from the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*. Pliny stated that the Minaeans (from the tiny kingdom of Ma'in) had 'originated the trade and chiefly practise it' and described the major part they played in it.¹¹ A surviving stela in the market place of Tamna', Qatabān's capital in what is now Wādī Bayḥān, bears this out; it is inscribed with the market regulations ordained by the king in c. 110 BC and records the special trading status enjoyed by Minaeans in the city.¹² Yet a century later Ma'in had completely disappeared from history.

FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH

The principal aromatics carried along the incense route were frankincense and myrrh (fig. 29).

Frankincense was the incense *par excellence*, sometimes mixed with other fragrant materials but used by the Romans in enormous quantities on its own. It burns with a pure white and very fragrant smoke, which wafted men's prayers to heaven and pleased or propitiated their gods as much as it fumigated their homes, countered bad drains and provided cures for their ailments. Frankincense, also known as *olibanum* (Arabic *luban*), is a white gum-resin which exudes in drops from cuts made in the branches and trunk of a small tree (*Boswellia sacra*) growing wild in inland areas of Arabia from Ḥaḍramawt eastwards as far as Dhofar, where most of it is found today. Other types of frankincense, some of high quality, come from other species of *Boswellia* (particularly *B. carteri* and *B. frereana*), found in the more eastern parts of northern Somalia (fig. 30). A very inferior sort is obtained from *B. papyrifera*, which grows widely from Sudan and Ethiopia to East Africa, and also *B. serrata*, found in

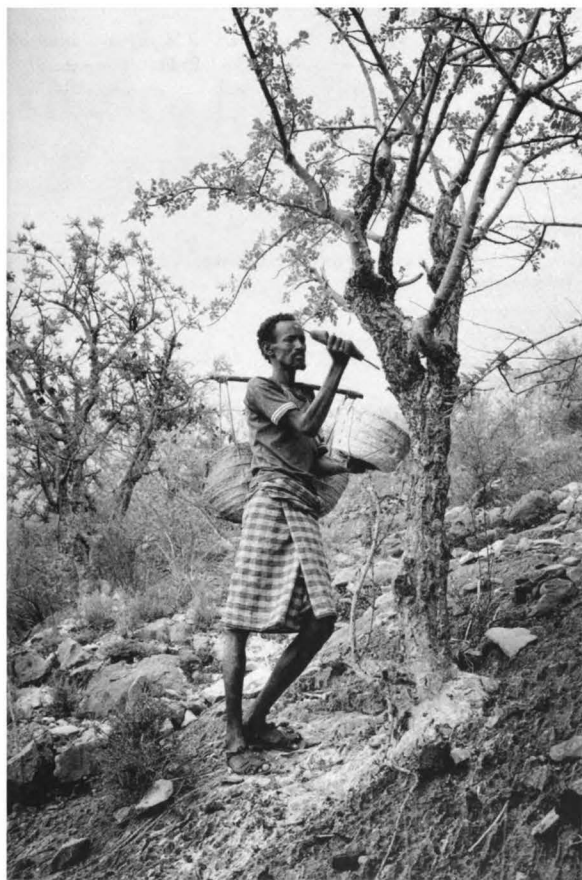


FIG. 30 Harvesting frankincense in Somaliland.
(Photo: H. Wilson)

India. Curiously, the island of Soqatra has several species of frankincense-producing *Boswellia* which are unique to it.

Myrrh (the word means 'bitter' in Arabic, describing its taste) was also used in incenses, but its primary value was in medicines, perfumes and, in Egypt, embalming. In early perfumery, where it was used in the form of an extracted oil called *stacte*, it had the longest life of any scent known and was of special value as a 'fixative', able to make other perfume ingredients mixed with it last much longer. But it does not in itself have a strong scent. In the classical world it was also sometimes added to wine to give it astringency. It is a darker, more oily gum-resin than frankincense, coming from a small and very thorny tree (*Commiphora myrrha* and other species) mostly found in the Yemen mountains west of Ḥaḍramawt

but growing widely as far east as Dhofar and as far north as Asir, as well as in Somalia and elsewhere. Pliny recognised different types of myrrh coming from Somalia and from different geographical areas of South Arabia.

TRADE BY LAND

The earliest Minaean merchants harvested frankincense not far from Shabwa and, because their crop was regarded as sacred, they were not allowed to encounter women or funeral processions while tapping the trees. As the trade expanded they sought more easterly groves. Eventually the demand was so huge that supplies were brought by sea both from the Horn of Africa ('the Far Side') and from Dhofar. Dhofari frankincense, a monopoly of the King of Ḥaḍramawt, was plentiful and of the best quality and was shipped to Qāni' (fig. 31), the port for Shabwa, in boats and on rafts from Moscha, the site of which probably lay somewhere west of present-day Salala. The climate and conditions in Dhofar were so bad that the king used slaves and prisoners to collect and load it. Soon after AD 50 a new port was established further to the east at Khawr Rūri, populated by immigrants from Shabwa, and at about the same time the facilities at Qāni', which also received gums from the Somali ports, were improved.

Until well into the first century AD, and perhaps for some while after, all frankincense off-loaded at Qāni' was carried by camels to the temple at Shabwa. A partly paved road led north over the mountains from Qāni' to Shabwa, where the temple priests took a portion of each load before the consignments were sold to merchants, originally all Minaeans, for onward conveyance. If the Qāni' merchants taking these loads up to Shabwa deviated from the highway to escape paying their temple dues they faced the death penalty.¹³

From Shabwa the waterless Empty Quarter of central Arabia compelled the incense caravans to trudge westwards towards Ma'in. Later, different routes skirting the Ramlat as-Sab'atayn were used, but in Minaean times, when Qatabān was at its most powerful, they seem to have threaded through southern hills and wādis, calling at Tamna', the capital city, where the Qatabanian king took his share of customs duty. All along this stretch caravans of myrrh joined the route. In c. 210 BC a spectacular mountain pass called Mablāqa was constructed just south of Tamna', providing a short cut for caravans on the next stage of their journey to the Sabaeen city of Mārib. They then headed northwards through Ma'in and Najrān. At some point, most probably Najrān, another remarkable group of long-distance traders joined the scene. These were the Gerrhaeans, who crossed the width of

Arabia to obtain South Arabian aromatics for Mesopotamia and the Gulf region. It was evidently a very profitable venture, for the Greek geographer Strabo recorded: 'From their trafficking both the Sabaeans and the Gerrhaeans have become richest of all', while other writers, even more carried away, averred that the columns of their houses were covered with silver and gold and the doors and ceilings encrusted with close-packed gems.¹⁴

The main route continued northwards, passing through Yathrib (now al-Madina) but keeping well to the east of Makka. The Minaeans had a substantial colony at Daydan (near Mada'in Salih), an important halting place, and the road then led on to Petra and Gaza, from where, until Alexandria became Rome's industrial capital, the aromatics were shipped into Europe. Sometimes the Minaean merchants seem to have travelled on with their goods: the Minaean inscription on a wooden sarcophagus of 264 BC from Memphis now in the Cairo Museum shows it con-

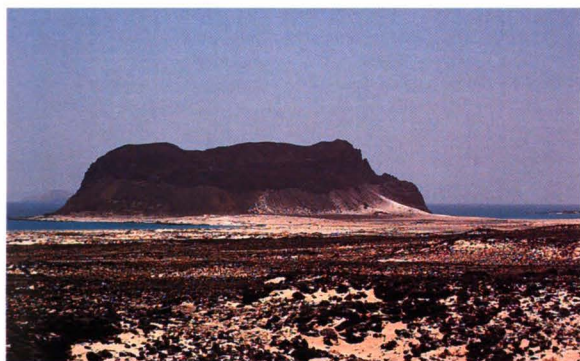


FIG. 31 View of Hushn al-Ghurāb, Qānī.
(Photo: A. Porter)

tained the body of Zayd'il bin Zayd, a Minaean trader who 'imported myrrh and calamus for the temples of the gods of Egypt', while a Minaean altar of the second century BC has been found in the Greek island of Delos (see fig. 22).¹⁵ Between Tamna' and Gaza there were, Pliny said, sixty-five stages. The total journey from Shabwa was about 2,750 km and would have taken two to three months at a normal camel's pace. All the way along, Pliny noted, the merchants 'keep on paying, at one place for water, at another for fodder, or the charges for lodging at the halts, and the various *octrois* [duties]: so that expenses mount up to 688 *denarii* per camel before the Mediterranean coast is reached; and then again payment is made to the customs officers of our empire.'¹⁶ Shipping across the Mediterranean added to the cost, and the merchants in Rome had to make their profit, so that Roman citizens

paid 6 *denarii* a pound for top-quality frankincense, more than most of them could earn in a fortnight, while a pound of myrrh, of which there were many varieties, cost the perfumers and apothecaries between 11 and 16 *denarii*.¹⁷

RED SEA TRADE

The incense road seems to have lasted for a long time after the alternative seaborne trade began to develop. This may have been due partly to the strong control over the handling of frankincense exercised in Ḥaḍramawt by the king and priests, and partly to the climatic timetable; because ships had to wait for seasonal winds, camels could carry the new harvest of frankincense to the Mediterranean more quickly. Eventually internal wars in Arabia diminished the overland trade, probably well before the demand for frankincense collapsed after Rome accepted Christianity (which did not use incense in its rituals until c. AD 450). But the inauguration of imperial Rome at the turn of the millennium heralded a vast expansion of sea trade from Egyptian Red Sea ports with Arabia, the Horn of Africa and especially India, which must ultimately have undercut the land-borne commerce.

The principal port of south-west Arabia in the time of the Roman Empire was Mouza, on the Ḥimyarite Red Sea coast some 32 km from the present-day inland town of Mawza', although the identification has not yet been confirmed through excavation. It was not a harbour but provided very good anchorages. Mouza belonged to the increasingly powerful Ḥimyarites, who were eventually to take over the entire region. Its merchants had a considerable trade with African ports across the Red Sea, such as Avalites near the Bāb al-Mandab, Adoulis near present-day Massawa, and no doubt Sosippi, corruptly placed in Ptolemy's map of c. AD 150 on the Arabian shore but clearly likely to have been Assab. From these places they and Greek-Egyptian traders obtained ivory, tortoiseshell, rhinoceros horn and some aromatics in exchange for a variety of clothing and fabrics, ornaments, tools, cooking pots, weapons, even olive oil and wine.¹⁸ In addition, despite difficult sailing conditions at the northern end of the Red Sea, numerous small Arab craft plied between Mouza and Leuke Komé (now Aynuna) bringing aromatics and other goods for Petra (fig. 32).

Mouza sold Yemeni products, chiefly myrrh and alabaster, to the merchants of Egypt, who brought with them for exchange all sorts of clothing and cloth, blankets, cloaks and girdles, together with saffron, storax, cyperus (an ingredient of Kuphi incense, from *Cyperus rotundus*), unguents, wine and grain.¹⁹ Many of these were probably at first brought overland by returning incense caravans. Mouza also had a major



FIG. 32 Traditional Red Sea shipping. (Photo: H. Wilson)

interest in a route that visited the Somali ports on the Horn of Africa, perhaps going on to Soqatra (which belonged to the King of Ḥaḍramawt and had some Greek settlers) or continuing south to tropical Africa, called Azania, as far as Rhapta near present-day Dar es-Salaam. Used by ships of Roman Egypt too, this route was developed by the Ḥimyarites; the *Periplus* recorded that Azania was 'by some ancient right' subject to Karib'il, the Ḥimyarite king, was ruled by his provincial governor, who lived inland from Mouza near present-day Ta'izz, and was taxed on his behalf by Mouza merchants who had settled in the country.²⁰ The principal luxury goods obtained on this route were frankincense, myrrh and other aromatics, cinnamon, ivory, tortoiseshell and nautilus shell, and rhinoceros horns, and there was also a market for slaves.²¹ To buy these items the Arab and Greek-Egyptian merchants offered the goods sold on the Red Sea coast, together with, at the wealthier ports, silver, ironware, 'numerous types of glass stones' and, to retain the goodwill of the local people in Azania, wine and grain. To enter this trade merchants from Egypt had to buy

the favours of the Ḥimyarite king when they first reached Mouza; this was done with costly gifts, such as 'horses and mules, vessels of gold and polished silver, finely woven clothing and copper vessels'.²²

Many of the Greek-Egyptian merchants sailed on from Mouza following the Arabian shore, perhaps stopping for fresh water at Okelis, an ancient South Arabian port just north of the Bāb al-Mandab (the area is now too sensitive militarily for archaeological investigation), or Eudaimon Arabia, now Aden, where the water was sweeter though access was difficult during the south-west monsoon. Eudaimon Arabia, the *Periplus* noted, had formerly been the port where ships following the earliest, coastal route from India would meet ships from Egypt to exchange their goods. Clinging to the coast, the traders then proceeded to Qāni', where they would present further costly gifts, this time for the King of Ḥaḍramawt. Qāni' was another busy port, not only receiving aromatics from Moscha and other coastal villages in Ḥaḍramawt and Somalia, but also trading with Oman, Scythia and Persia as well as India. The *Periplus* advised merchants

to take the same goods there as they sold in Mouza, including wheat and wine, together with clothing, copper, tin, coral and storax.²³ Apart from frankincense they could load up there with aloe, which may have been locally grown *Aloe vera* or *Aloe pernyi* from Soqatra, used for skin treatment then as now.

Very many merchants, including those of Mouza, went on to India, originally to Barbarikon, at the mouth of the Indus, or Barygaza, on the Narmada river, later to ports further south, where a huge array of exotic luxury goods could be obtained. But to engage in this rich trade they had to purchase the goodwill of the king with comparable largesse, the *Periplus* recommending gifts such as 'precious silverware, slave musicians and beautiful girls'.²⁴ The journey to Barygaza was for long a coastal one, but towards the end of the last century BC the Greek-Egyptians, with exceptionally sturdy vessels able to withstand the buffeting of the monsoon storms, began to exploit a newly discovered sailing technique which used the strong south-west monsoon wind to get them there and the lighter north-east monsoon wind to return by. On the outward journey this meant heading due east into the open sea as soon as they had passed Ras Fartak, the prominent headland between Qāni' and Moscha, and allowing the wind to take them north-east after a number of days, varying according to the port they were aiming for. In later times huge Roman vessels collecting pepper and other spices would sail to south India directly after picking up water at Okelis. Ships returning late in the season sometimes had to pass the winter at Moscha, exchanging Indian goods for frankincense, but 'neither covertly nor overtly can frankincense be loaded aboard a ship without royal permission; if even a grain is lifted aboard, the ship cannot sail, since it is against god's will'.²⁵ Sometimes the return journey from India was made via Soqatra and the 'Far Side' ports, where Somali aromatics were taken on board in exchange for those more basic Indian goods which their impoverished inhabitants could afford – grain, rice, ghee, sesame oil, cotton cloth and sugar.

In all this trading, as will become apparent, the merchants from Egypt were almost exclusively seeking luxury goods for Rome, from which they stood to make enormous profits. In Egypt itself the transport of this valuable cargo was highly organised. The Ptolemies built a chain of fortified stations with watering points across the desert from the Egyptian ports of Myos Hormos and Berenike to Koptos, on the Nile, from where cargo was taken down by river-boat to Alexandria. 'At Alexandria . . . where frankincense is worked up for sale', Pliny wrote, 'no vigilance is sufficient to guard the factories. A seal is put upon the

workmen's aprons, they have to wear a mask or net with a close mesh on their heads, and before they are allowed to leave the premises they have to take off all their clothes'.²⁶

OTHER FORMS OF INCENSE

Of course, the 'perfumes of Arabia' comprised much more than frankincense and myrrh, although these were the two most important of the aromatic materials brought to Rome. As well as gums there were bdelliums and balsams. We have the early names of many of these items, but their botanical identification is by no means complete and they still present problems. Until



FIG. 33 Painted limestone cuboid incense burner, inscribed with the letters 'kmkm', possibly 5th–4th centuries BC (cat. 101).
(The Trustees of The British Museum)

very recently, for example, it was believed that Pliny's Scented Myrrh, opopanax in modern perfumery, came from a variety of the tree *Commiphora erythraea* which grows in Arabia, Somalia and Eritrea; now it has been found to derive from *C. guidottii*, confined to eastern and southern Somalia, a discovery puzzling for scholars who had supposed it might be the 'ntyw incense once brought by the ancient Egyptians from the Land of Punt'.²⁷

Among artefacts retrieved in archaeological excavations in South Arabia have been a number of small incense altars, usually cubes of stone some 5 to 10 cm high (fig. 33). Many of them have the names of incenses inscribed in letters of the early South Arabian alphabet on one or more sides.²⁸ These have provided the local names of several different incenses used in South Arabia at the time, mostly, as far as we can see, locally grown materials:

Ldn (in South Arabian script the words are unvowelled) is recognisable as ladanum (or labdanum). Herodotus described it as 'an ingredient

in many kinds of perfumes' and 'what the Arabians chiefly burn as incense' (here presumably referring to Arabians from north Arabia, where it grew).²⁹ It is an oleo-resin exuded from the leaves of the rock rose (*Cistus incanus*) and other species of *Cistus*, and was also called goat's beard because it clung to the beards of grazing goats, from which it was collected by combing. It is still used in perfumery today.

Qlm identifies with calamus, also known as scented reed, which Pliny described as having 'a specially fine scent which attracts people even from a long way off'. There is inscriptional evidence of a third-century BC Minaean merchant who sold calamus (as well as myrrh) in Egypt and it was a constituent of Egypt's famous Kuphi incense. It was probably lemon grass, also known as camel grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*). The calamus oil used in modern perfumery comes from a different plant, sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*).

Kamkām and *darw* are closely connected. The former, as *cancanum*, was described by Dioscorides as the gum of an Arabian tree resembling myrrh, while the latter, *tarum* in Latin, was noted by Pliny as always found in conjunction with *cancanum*.³⁰ The two are thought most likely to be respectively the gum and wood of the mastic tree (*Pistacia lentiscus*), which grows in South Arabia and the Horn of Africa.

Qusṭ on the altars is clearly *costus*, which the *Periplus* listed as an export from Barygaza in India. As used in perfumery today it comes from a north Indian herb called *Saussurea lappa*, native to the Himalayas. But the earlier classical sources mention a 'white' Arabian variety which the Arabians used themselves and which was regarded as the best.³¹ Theophrastus even described it as one of the principal plants used in Greek perfumery. If it did indeed originate in South Arabia this variety may have come from the plant *Costus arabicus*.

Additional names on the South Arabian incense altars include *Lbny*, which is frankincense; oddly enough this does not occur very often, suggesting it was not used very much in domestic religious rituals in South Arabia. *Rnd* appears most frequently; it has not yet been identified but may be an Arabian variety of

spikenard spoken of by both classical and Islamic authors. Others will no doubt be revealed as more such altars are discovered.

Surprisingly, the aromatic which it is most difficult to reconcile with our information about the ancient Arabian incense trade is cinnamon, which occurs frequently in the texts, usually in conjunction with cassia, to the extent that the two seem to be synonymous or at the very least two varieties of the same species. Both were mentioned by Herodotus as coming from Arabia, and Pliny even reported from an early source that they were brought to Arabia from Africa on rafts which came to Okelis in the days when it belonged to the King of Qatabān, in the third century BC.³² Yet cinnamon as we know it today (*Cinnamomum verum*) grows only in the Far East. Many scholars have held, and some indeed still do, that it must have been reaching the Horn of Africa by sea from the earliest days and that the Arabs concealed this to protect their trading interests. But this does not conform with what we know about the essentially coastal nature of maritime trading in earliest times. Botanists have suggested that, as has happened in other cases, cinnamon and cassia may originally have been derived from African or Arabian plants now forgotten, before similar but superior products from India began to be imported in Roman times and took on their names. Despite descriptions of the plants provided by the classical authors, no suitable candidates have yet been identified by botanists, but a proposal that the plant concerned was one known to early Arab authorities as *Qirfa* (the present Arabic word for cinnamon), which grew both in the Horn of Africa and in Arabia, may provide a solution to this perplexing problem.

In addition to cyperus, one other aromatic differs from the rest in that it was an import into Arabia (both to Mouza and to Qāni') rather than an export. This was storax, a gum deriving from a tree (*Syrax officinalis*) which grows in Syria and Asia Minor. Pliny described it as a 'pleasant, almost pungent scent' and the Arabs used it to fumigate their clothes and houses and to drive out snakes from the groves when they were collecting frankincense.³³ Here botanists face another problem because, although they are quite sure their identification is correct, the modern tree for some unknown reason no longer produces any gum. But perhaps, as with cinnamon, a little mystery is not amiss in a trade so surrounded by mystique.

Incense burners and trade goods

The production and export of incense was a fundamental part of the economy of ancient South Arabia. The frequency and variety of shape and size of the incense burners found within this region underline the importance of incense within local society, which is a feature that continues today. Metal incense burners were doubtless the most valuable but these do not survive in great numbers, probably because the metal was recycled once the object was discarded. Stone and pottery versions are more common. The fronts of these were often decorated with divine astral symbols; the stone examples were occasionally also inscribed with the names of one or more types of incense. The shallow recessed upper portion held the incense and varies in form.

99 Inscribed calcite-alabaster stela with a scene of an offering to the sun goddess Shams

Tan'im

c. 1st century AD

H 20.6 cm, W 10.5 cm, TH 4 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 386

This stela is inscribed:

Work of Lahay'athar, the Sabaeen, for Shams, goddess of Abibahath, wife of Tubba'; they drew for the goddess [their] booty, conforming to that which they pledged, promised and vowed. That [Shams] accord her [Abibahath] prosperity. Tubba' son of Subh.

The woman seated on the folding chair with the offering is presumably the dedicant, Abibahath (see also cats 142, 297). The warrior standing on a stool to the right is probably intended to represent her husband Tubba'. In the centre of the inscription are symbols previously suggested to be those of the moon and the planet Venus (but see this volume, Chapter 11); an incense burner is placed directly beneath the inscription between the two figures (Seipel ed. 1998, 86).

100 Ceramic incense burner

As-Samsara, temple of Wadd dhū-Masma'

8th–7th centuries BC

H 16.5 cm, D 16.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 2536

The site of as-Samsara is located 10 km west of Mārib. The site was explored in 1982 by the German Archaeological Institute in Yemen. The Wadd dhū-Masma' temple was small and rectangular with three cellae at the north-east end opposite the entrance. Several ceramic vessels full of frankincense



99



100

were discovered in the building (Breton 1999, 13; Schmidt 1987). This inscribed ceramic incense burner with the applied crescent moon and planet symbol was discovered in the temple. The inscription, on one side and underneath the upper edge, is written in the same cursive script found on potsherds inscribed with personal names

discovered in the German excavations of the Awwām temple cemetery at Mārib, and on inscribed wooden sticks. The inscription is a personal dedication in which a woman devotes her service to Wadd dhū-Masma': 'Khirāsh has dedicated her person to Wadd dhū-Masma' (Seipel ed. 1998, 90). Worship of the deity Wadd was common throughout the Jawf, the Wādī Markha and around Ṣana'a', in contrast to the kingdom of Saba' where 'Almaqah was the chief deity.

101 Painted limestone cuboid incense burner

Provenance uncertain

Possibly 5th–4th centuries BC

H 9.5 cm, W 9.5 cm, TH 9.5 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1915-7-10,5 = 113230

Presented by H. Oppenheimer and Maurice Rosenheim

Cuboid incense burners have a long history in the ancient Near East. They were particularly popular in the Levant and Arabia from the late fifth century BC to the first century AD and were specifically used to burn natural aromatics within the home and temple.

This type of cuboid incense burner is especially important because the four sides are occasionally inscribed with the names of four different sorts of local aromatics. This incense burner (see fig. 33) was presented to the Museum, together with a similar one (ANE 1915-7-10,6 = 113231) which is inscribed with the terms *rand*, *dhahab* (a golden coloured gum?), *nā'im* (a 'benevolent' gum), and *qusf* (Ryckmans 1927, 32). Both were decorated with lightly incised cross-hatching on the legs with rows of triangles above and below the inscription, and a reddish-brown pigment was used to decorate the exterior surfaces. These incense burners were part of a larger collection of South Arabian antiquities formed by Lieutenant-Colonel W.F. Prideaux, some of which he presented to the British Museum between 1871 and 1875; Prideaux was subsequently posted as Acting British Resident at Bushire from 1876 to 1877.¹

This particular example reads *rand*, *darw*, *kamkām* and *qusf*. The term *rand* in Classical Arabic refers to myrtle, aloe wood, or laurel and the word in Yemen denotes a plant with

perfumed leaves. *Ḍarw* may be identified with a variety of balsam or a pistachio tree from Yemen, the leaves of which are still used in perfume and medicine. It is also the name of the resin from the *kamkām* and a type of sage bush. *Kamkām* is the 'kagkamon' or 'cancanum' mentioned by Graeco-Roman authors and is described as a resin from a tree in Arabia, similar to myrrh. Classical Arab scholars gave the *kamkām* two different definitions. Some believed that it was a tree with a resin called *ḍarw* whereas others thought it was the resin of the tree called *ḍarw*. *Qusṭ* or *costus* is a root that was known to have grown in the Indus delta and may have been imported to Yemen. *Costus* was used for making oil or fumigations.

Some burners include the word 'libnay' which refers to frankincense from the *Boswellia* tree. This tree is particularly rare and only grows in southern Yemen (Ḥaḍramawt, Mehra and Ḍafār), Soqatra, the Horn of Africa and India. Frankincense was burned in religious and funerary rituals, and used as a perfume, a gum and as medicine (Robin 1994). There were numerous types of aromatic woods, barks, roots and resins used in South Arabia, many of which have yet to be identified. Although frankincense was traded, many of these other aromatics were probably not commercialised. Strangely enough, myrrh is not mentioned on the South Arabian incense burners. This may be because myrrh was not burned but was used in medicine and possibly in the preservation of the dead (Robin 1994, 30).

1 W.F. Prideaux discovered an inscription in the Ṣana'a' area in 1875 which is now in the Musée du Louvre, Paris. This political officer should not be confused with Colonel F.B. Prideaux, Political Resident in Bahrain, who excavated a number of Bronze Age tumuli there on behalf of the Archaeological Department of the Government of India in 1906/7 (reprinted in Rice ed. 1984, 103–28).

102 Painted limestone cuboid incense burner

Ḥurayḍah, Sayin temple, phase C or later
3rd century BC or later

H 20 cm, w 10 cm (opening 9.7 × 7.8 cm)
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.578

This incense burner was found as part of a votive group placed beside an altar in front of the Temple 'C' façade at Ḥurayḍah (Caton-Thompson 1944, 46–7, pls XII: B, B2, XVI: 1, XVII: 3; Stark 1940, 74; see also cats 115,



102



103



104

211). This rectangular incense burner has four short, square legs about 4.7 cm long, which have not been carved free underneath. The sides have been decorated with zones of freehand cross-hatching, four bands on two sides and three on the other two. A diagonal double cross was incised on each leg after it was stained with haematite (Caton-Thompson 1944, 50). Some of the incense burners from this group contained traces of a greasy, dark brown substance which H.J. Plenderleith from the British Museum verified as a resin that gave off a fragrant odour on heating (Caton-Thompson 1944, 50).

103 Limestone cuboid incense burner with 'false window' decoration

Tamna', Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Locus 0-6 Area B
First half of 1st century AD
H 11.5 cm, w 9.7 cm, TH 9.7 cm
The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TC 2011

The recessed panelling on the sides and legs imitate contemporary architectural decoration. This particular incense burner was the finest to be discovered in the 1951–2 excavations in the Tamna' cemetery (Cleveland 1965, 120, pl. 91).

104 Bronze incense burner with ibex figure

Mārib
Possibly 3rd century BC
H 23.9 cm, w 18 cm, D 13.5 cm; 2388 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1960-12-1.1 = 132909
Presented by Dr Sidney E. Croskery

This cast bronze incense burner is in the form of a bowl with a splayed foot, one wall raised to form a sort of shield surmounted by spikes, with the front decorated with the standing figure of an ibex below a crescent moon symbol which was originally highlighted with inlay, now missing (Barnett 1963/4, 87, pl. XLIIIa; du Ry 1969, 257). Traces of the clay core resulting from the original casting process are visible within the bowl. The ibex presumably served both as a convenient handle and as a cult object (see also cat. 301). Two very similar bronze incense burners exist in the University Museum, Philadelphia, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Muscarella

1988, 353–5, no. 476), and others are reported from excavations at Tamna'. A similar ivory container was excavated in a ninth-century-BC context at the site of Hama in central Syria (Riis 1948, 179–82, fig. 230), but whether this was imported from southern Arabia is uncertain, as is its function because ivory is not a particularly suitable material for an incense burner (Barnett 1964).

105 Limestone incense burner

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

7th–6th centuries BC

H 55 cm, W 16 cm, TH 16 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 1197

The decoration on the front and sides of this tall incense burner imitates that used on architectural façades (see fig. 43, rear).

106 Limestone incense burner with flaring base

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

1st century AD

H 36.5 cm, W 26 cm, TH 26 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 404

The front of this incense burner is decorated with divine astral symbols (see fig. 43, centre right). This type of incense burner appeared in the fifth century BC in South Arabia and Ethiopia and often carries votive inscriptions (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 72).

107 Limestone incense burner with conical base

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

5th–4th centuries BC

H 30.5 cm, D 23 cm, H of letters 4 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 843 and 873
(DAI-Bar'ān 1994–6)

This was the only circular incense burner on a conical base to be found in the Bar'ān temple (see fig. 43, centre left). It was discovered in the eastern part of the temple beneath the podium. The flared base and general form suggest that this may be a copy of a metal prototype. The incense burner is damaged, and the original decoration on the side, a frontal depiction of the head of an ibex, has been broken off. The rim is decorated with a row of regular projections, which also used to decorate the upper courses of temple walls, 'false windows'

(National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 10240), inscriptions (YM 11126 and YM 11192) and bronze and stone incense burners (YM 10884, ANE 132909). Similar pieces, from the same early period, were found in great numbers in the sanctuaries at Jabal al-Lawdh and also near Gobochele in Ethiopia. The inscription reads: 'Amm'amar, son of Nabat'il, [...], has dedicated [this incense burner] to Hawbas'. Among the votive inscriptions from the Bar'ān temple, the majority of which are dedicated to the Sabaeen principal god 'Almaqah, there are, therefore, some that are addressed to other deities. Two of these inscriptions are dedicated to the goddess Hawbas, the divine spouse of the principal god of the old South Arabian pantheon, 'Athtar. The object of the dedication, not mentioned in the short inscription, is the incense burner itself, on which the dedication is inscribed (Seipel ed. 1998, 86).

108 Votive altar with two compartments

Possibly Dhamār in the central Yemen highlands

3rd–4th centuries AD

H 18 cm, W 31 cm, TH 16 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 8777

The text of the inscription reads: 'Lahay'at and his brother 'Arb from the tribe Yuhamin dedicated to their patron god this altar, for their welfare and the welfare of young and old [...]' (Seipel ed. 1998, 86; see fig. 43, front).

109 Decorated circular limestone incense burner with conical base

Possibly from Hashid

2nd–3rd centuries AD

H 14 cm, D 16 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 10884

The decoration on the bowl of this incense burner combines crescent symbols and star with a classical vine scroll and regular panelling similar to that found on the capping course of the ovoid wall of the Maḥram Bilqis and many other temples both in South Arabia and East Africa (see this volume, Chapter 8). The overall form of this incense burner suggests inspiration from a metal prototype, although no metal exemplars of this type have yet been excavated.



109



110

110 Calcite-alabaster incense burner showing a camel rider

Shabwa

c. 3rd century AD

H 32 cm, W 15 cm, TH 8 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1937-5-7.1 = 125682

Presented by H. St J.B. Philby

This widely illustrated incense burner was acquired at the city-site of Shabwa by H. St J.B. Philby (1885–1960), the famous Arabian traveller and father of H.A. (Kim) Philby, the English spy (Philby 1939, 84–5;

see Philby 1981, col. pl.; Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 70). The two-line Sabaeen inscription implies that this object was dedicated to a temple by 'Adhlal, son of Waha'il'. This individual is possibly the same as that shown on the burner, that is, a man seated in front of the hump of a dromedary camel, with a circular shield or waterskin slung above the camel's left rear leg. This style of camel riding is also illustrated on north Arabian desert graffiti and contrasts with the use of a constructed pack-saddle. The interpretation of the circular object – also represented on a stela in the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Calvet and Robin *et al.* 1997, 109–10, no. 20) – is ambiguous, as Palmyrene sculptures indicate this to be a shield (Tanabe ed. 1986, 128, 174, pls 92–3, 141), whereas glazed ceramic pilgrim flasks made in imitation of leather flasks have been found interred with camel burials at Mleha in south-east Arabia (Jasim 1999, 88). The dromedary is indigenous to Arabia but, although hunted as a source of meat, was not domesticated until the early first millennium BC. This development greatly increased the value of camels, not only as a new form of transport but also as a valuable source of milk and hair, important secondary products that came to economically outweigh the value of these animals as a potential source of meat.

Shabwa is located at the mouth of the Wādī 'Irm and may have been occupied as early as the mid-second millennium BC; it grew to become the capital of the Ḥaḍramawt between the fifth century BC and fifth century AD (Breton 1999, 47). It was known to Classical writers as Sabata or Sabota and according to Pliny (6.155) was famed for its sixty temples. Philby visited Shabwa in 1936 during his journey from Mecca to al-Mukalla and described what he mistook for the Ḥimyarite capital as 'disappointingly small and insignificant ... with not a pillar of the sixty temples erect' (Philby 1939, 85, 88–90). He bought eight inscriptions, later donated to the British Museum, and copied five others. Brief amateur excavations were conducted here over 'a busy six weeks' in 1938 by R.A.B. Hamilton (see cat. 193) and a fine sculpture of a goddess holding a cornucopia was acquired here in 1939 by W.H. Ingrams (see cat. 234). In 1975 the French Archaeological Expedition initiated serious excavations at the site, initially directed by J. Pirenne and subsequently by J.-F. Breton.

These investigations have revealed the palace, great north gate, structures along the main street within the city and a number of tombs. A monumental temple (Chantier II) dedicated to Sayin, the chief deity of the Ḥaḍramawt, was located at the southern end of the main road (Breton and Darles 1998). During the final temple phase in the first to third centuries AD, the entrance consisted of a monumental stairway, which led up to four bronze statues in front of four bronze-covered pillars. No inscriptions were found *in situ* but one was found nearby which mentions a temple dedicated to Sayin dhū-Alim in the city of Shabwa; this was presented to the British Museum by Brigadier-Colonel Coghlan in 1862 (Breton 1997b, 146). There were a number of other temples in addition to an extramural temple on a nearby hill. The eastern part of the city was crowded with multi-storey tower houses with rectangular stone foundations and superstructures constructed of wood and unfired mudbrick (Breton ed. 1998, 48). The stone foundations reached a height of 2–4 m above the ground and were 1–2 m thick in order to support the superstructure. The first floor was accessed via a staircase, which was built against the exterior of the foundation wall. Although there is no archaeological evidence to suggest the original height of the buildings, there are inscriptions that mention four or even six storeys (Breton 1999, 82–3).

Shabwa was almost completely surrounded by a circle of low hills upon which were built the outer fortification walls. Although there were not as many natural resources in the Wādī Ḥaḍramawt compared to the Wādīs Jawf, Dhana and Bayhān, and the floods near Shabwa were relatively small and infrequent, the city was built on an extensive salt dome which was mined in antiquity. This provided it with a major source of income, as salt was extensively traded and taxed in antiquity, and this continued to be 'prized all over the country' (Stark 1936, 131; Breton *et al.* 1998, 130; see also Simpson 2001a). Shabwa was also strategically located on several important trade routes that led to Ma'in or Najrān and to the coast at Qānī', although there is very little in the archaeological record which specifically relates to the incense trade (Breton 1987, 15; 1999, 47).

111 Limestone royal decree concerning the regulation of business and financial transactions at Mārib

(Not illustrated)

Mārib

End of 3rd century AD

H 31 cm, w 93 cm, TH 15 cm
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1911-5-13.2 = 104396

This royal decree by Shammar Yuha'ish, King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, concerns the regulation of the sale of slaves and animals in the capital at Mārib. The inscription reads:

Thus has King Shammar Yuha'ish, King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, the son of Yāsir Yuha[n'im, King] of Saba' and of dhū-Raydān, for their subjects, the tribe of Saba', the inhabitants of the city of Mārib and their valleys, commanded, decided, ordered and confirmed, as to every sale and every transaction which they undertake concerning a human being, a camel, a bull, a beast of burden or anything else: if someone buys a male or a female slave, a beast of burden or something else, the waiting-time (before the transaction is completed) shall be one month; if someone wants to return a camel, a bull or a beast of burden after ten or twenty days he has to pay a hire charge for the time during which he has used it, if a beast of burden dies while at its purchasers after the seventh day has ended, then the seller is released from all responsibility for its death and loss, and the purchaser must pay the seller its price; if someone borrows or lends money or goods, or agrees on a hire charge or a payment at an unspecified date with a male slave or a female slave (Seipel ed. 1998, 98).

112 Bronze camel statuette with a dedication to the god Wadd'ab

The Ḥaḍramawt

Possibly 2nd–1st centuries BC

H 11 cm, l 11 cm, w 1.2 cm; 140.3 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1907-10-12.5 = 102480

This camel statuette is depicted with a halter around its neck and is inscribed with a short dedicatory inscription to the god Wadd'ab (Ryckmans 1951, 35); a similar example in the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich is inscribed with a dedication to



112

'Zalim, son of Harmat, as he has promised the lord of the sanctuary' (Seipel ed. 1998, 315, no. 219). Uninscribed bronze camel statuettes are also known, including those excavated at Qaryat al-Fau (Kitchen 1998, 152–4 and refs). Camels played a key role in transport between the South Arabian cities and longer-distance trade linking Arabia with other parts of the Near East, hence it is unsurprising to find that they were represented in this form.

113 An inscribed bronze figurine of a camel with an unusual saddle

Provenance uncertain

H 6.3 cm, L 7.8 cm, TH 2.1 cm; 130.8 g (max.)

The British Museum, London, ANE 1992-6-23.3

This figurine is so unusual that its authenticity has been doubted. The letter-forms of the inscriptions on both flanks are very peculiar and they appear to have been cut through the patina. However, even if the inscription is a fake it may well have been carved onto a genuine figurine. The camel appears to be a male dromedary. It is quite well formed in profile, but when viewed head-on the body is clearly far too flat, which suggests that it may have been intended to be seen from the side. In quality, it is comparable to the bronze figurines of camels without saddles which also are very flat (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 12–13), unlike an inscribed saddleless camel (*ibid.*, 129) which is a much more lively representation.

The most interesting feature is the saddle, which is like a chair placed before the hump. No indication is given of the method by which it was attached. Saddles of this type can still be found in north Africa but are extremely rare in the Middle East both in antiquity and today. In riding a camel, three

positions are possible: behind the hump on a pad resting on the crupper (as among the Bedouin in Oman and in camel-racing throughout Arabia); on a saddle made up of a frame which fits over the hump (as used throughout Arabia except parts of Oman); and on a chair-like structure tied in front of the hump (as used principally in north Africa). Bareback riding normally consists of lying flat on the crupper and clinging onto the hump, but theoretically could also be done sitting on or in front of the hump, though both the last positions are very unstable. There are representations of all these positions, both bareback and with saddles, in ancient rock-drawings and reliefs. A rock-drawing from near Tabuk in north-western Arabia shows a camel with a rectangular object strapped in front of the hump by a triple girth. This drawing is part of a composition which could date to as early as the eighth century BC (Macdonald 1996, pls 224–5). An unpublished rock-drawing from north-eastern Jordan dated roughly to the first or second century AD shows a rider perched on what looks like a pad held onto the front slope of the hump by a triple girth. Both these drawings are very detailed and were the work of nomads, who might be expected to have an accurate knowledge of camel trappings. A South Arabian relief (cat. 285) showing a man apparently riding bare-

back in front of the hump might be treated as fanciful if it were not that riders are occasionally portrayed in the same position in rock-drawings by nomads in northern Arabia. The type of saddle most commonly portrayed both in north Arabian rock-art and on South Arabian stelae is the frame which fits over the hump, of which there were several sub-varieties (for South Arabian examples see CIH 698, 705, 708, 718, 719, etc.). MCAM

114 Painted ceramic camel figurine

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Awām cemetery, Area A

7th–4th centuries BC

H 10.8 cm, W 10.2 cm, TH 3.4 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW98A 2165

This figurine was presumably made as a cheap form of dedicatory offering. It belongs to a large group of clay figurines and miniature offerings found in this cemetery (see also cats 287–302). The painted decoration is a crude attempt to represent the harness. Real camels were on occasion slaughtered and interred within graves, a custom practised in southern Arabia and also throughout south-east and eastern Arabia in the early centuries AD and celebrated in early Arab literature (Vogt 1994; Sedov 1997d; Jasim 1999).



113



115

115 Stone slab with graffiti and engraving of a camel

Huraydah, Sayin temple extramural buildings
3rd century BC or later
H 23 cm, W 18 cm
Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.572

The graffiti'd inscriptions on this stone slab were engraved by different people. The first set of inscriptions above the camel includes the verb 'enlarged' (or Hafshah) and the proper name 'Yagur'. The second inscription above the camel's head possibly contains the name 'Riyyam' which is separated by a single letter inscribed by another hand. Under the camel is the word 'Rabbānum'. Between the feet is the word 'Gufrum', beneath which are another two South Arabian letters. The stone slab may once have been part of the stone façade of the Sayin temple. This is one of two slabs found associated with an altar-like structure which was built of reused materials near the temple during the post-C phase (Caton-Thompson 1944, 53; Ryckmans 1944, 164–5).

seventh century AD, after which it was replaced by new ports at ash-Shihir and later al-Mukalla (Sedov 1992; 1997b; 2001).

The lower settlement at Qāni' included over 100 rectangular houses and warehouses. A necropolis dating to the second to fifth centuries AD was situated to the north-west, and the remains of an enormous temple dedicated to the god Sayin, chief deity of the



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116 Ceramic amphora

Qāni'
End of 2nd–4th centuries AD
H 80 cm, D 34 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 386

The archaeological site of Qāni' is located on the Gulf of Aden, 3 km south-west of the modern town of Bi'r 'Ali. The *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (*Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*), a mid-first-century-AD navigation manual, states that Qāni' and Mouza (located near al-Makhā' on the southern Red Sea coast) were the main ports on the southern coast of Arabia. Lieutenant J.R. Wellsted is usually credited with being the first European to describe the structural remains of this ancient port-city (Wellsted 1838). Since 1985 a Soviet-Yemeni team have conducted excavations at Qāni'. The excavation results suggest that ancient Qāni' was established at the beginning of the first century AD, reached its height between the end of the second century and the fifth century AD, declined and was finally abandoned at the beginning of the

Ḥaḍramawt, and a synagogue were located to the south-west of the city. The fortress of Urr Mawiyat, which has been identified as a light-house, four immense cisterns, and a number of other buildings were located on the top of a volcanic outcrop called Husn al-Ghurāb to the south of the settlement (see fig. 31). Large quantities of incense, sometimes contained within palm leaf baskets, were found in some large multi-roomed structures at the foot of Husn al-Ghurāb. These buildings probably served as incense storage and were the oldest constructions at Qāni'.

Numerous amphorae were discovered during the Soviet-Yemeni excavations at Qāni' and during a French-Italian underwater archaeological survey off the coast in 1996 (Davidde and Petriaggi 1999). A particular type of Roman amphora, the Dressel 2/4, was a common discovery in the earliest phases of Qāni' and in the underwater survey of the inner northern bay, 150 m from the coast. These amphorae were based on prototypes from the Aegean island of Kos and they were characterised by long bifid

handles (formed of two long rolls of clay), a sharply carinated shoulder and a long pointed base. They were often stamped on the spike, neck or handle with two or three letters (Peacock and Williams 1986, 105–6).

On this amphora there are two inscriptions on the neck, a monogram composed of Latin letters L and N and a second above it in Palmyrene and incised before firing which gives the name of a person or people (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 193–5). This type of amphora was mainly manufactured in the western Mediterranean, in Italy (Campania, Latium and Etruria), Spain (Catalonia and Baetica) and southern and central France (Peacock and Williams 1986, 105–6), but a Dressel 2/4 workshop has also been found in Egypt (Empereur 1986). They were distributed from Britain to the eastern Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa and in Eastern India (Peacock and Williams 1986, 106).

117 Potsherds

(Not illustrated)

Qānī

2nd–4th centuries AD

H 8.6 cm (max.), L 6.5 cm (max.)

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 382, 384, 385

The ceramic finds at Qānī attest to the international trade during the Roman period. In addition to Roman amphorae (cat. 116), this trade included Nabataean painted pottery, jugs from Thebes and Aswan in Egypt, and Indian ceramics, which have also been found at the Egyptian ports of Berenike and Coptos. In addition, there were imports from Aksum and Iran, the latter evidence consisting of south-east Iranian Fine Orange Painted Ware (Sedov 1992; see also cat. 118). The *Periplus* suggests that textiles, clothing, gold, tin, copper, coral, pearls, styrax (tree resin), wheat, rice, wine, dates, sesame oil, slaves, horses, statues and silver for the royal court were being imported via ports such as Qānī.

118 Sasanian cut-glass bowl

The Jawf

6th century AD

H 5.6 cm, D 20.9 cm

The Military Museum, Ṣana'ā, 106

This is one of the first Sasanian imports to be recognised from Yemen, although incorrectly attributed to an Alexandrian workshop of the second to third centuries AD in earlier publications (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 209, 235; Seipel ed. 1998, 341, 342). It belongs to a type of shallow glass bowl dating to the sixth century AD, of which

period in the late pre-Islamic history of Yemen. During the mid-sixth century, the former Abyssinian general, Abraha, established himself as King of Yemen and, according to his monumental stela (see fig. 18), received envoys of the Abyssinian and Roman kings, a Persian delegation and emissaries of central and north Arabian princes (Müller 1998). Following a failed attempt to seize Makka, Abraha was defeated and the Abyssinians driven out of Yemen by a Persian army commanded by Wahriz. Thereafter, for the ensuing half-century, southern Arabia became a vassal state of the



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examples have been excavated at Kish and Nineveh, both in present-day Iraq but then part of the Sasanian Empire. The extant examples measure only about 5 cm in height but have diameters of 20–23 cm; plain versions have not been recognised. The thick walls suggest that they were produced by blowing the hot glass into open moulds, followed by fire-polishing of the rims and cold-working to create the faceted walls. They belong to a Sasanian tradition of cut glass – best exemplified by hemispherical faceted bowls – which is unparalleled from the Roman world yet was highly valued within the Sasanian Empire and its eastern neighbours. The fabrics of these two types of bowl vary from clear with a light yellowish or greenish tinge to light brown, dark brown or light green, occasionally with pinhead bubbles. Stratified finds indicate that both types date to the sixth to seventh centuries rather than the fourth to fifth centuries date range suggested in some earlier literature (e.g. Harden 1934, fig. 4: 6; Negro Ponzi 1987, 270–72, fig. C: types P–Q).

The bowl thus dates to an interesting

Sasanian Empire and was directly ruled by a Persian satrap from AD 597/8 until AD 628 when the governor, Bādhān, famously converted to Islam.

Although Sasanian glazed pottery has been excavated at Matara and the Aksumite capital in Ethiopia (e.g. Munro-Hay 1996, 413), reliable archaeological evidence for this important period in Yemeni history has hitherto not been widely recognised (for the historical evidence, see Hoyland 2001; see also cat. 117). A number of Sasanian seals, some with personal names written in Middle-Persian (Pahlavi), have been reported from Yemen, but the lack of archaeological context for these has led to popular attributions such as 'the royal seal of Bilqis, Queen of Sheba' (Anon. 1961). Several figural sculptures from Zafār and Husn al-Urr have been loosely termed 'Sasanian' but realistic parallels in Sasanian art are lacking (Costa 1978; Keall 1995) and claims for a Sasanian date for the Aden Tanks or the introduction of glass production into Yemen are even less convincing (e.g. see Doe 1971, 135–6, pl. 48).

Agriculture and the Countryside

TONY J. WILKINSON

Now adjacent to this waterless and desolate land is another Arabia so much superior to the first [Jordan] that, from the great profusion of foodstuffs and other material goods produced therein, it has been named Arabia the Fortunate. For it brings forth reeds and rushes in abundance and every other aromatic shrub besides and, in general, all manner of fragrant foliage. And it is famous for the varied scents of the gummy exudations from its trees; for the most remote corner of this land produces myrrh, as well as frankincense, which is most pleasing to the gods and is exported to all the inhabited world. And such luxuriant pastures and thickets of costus and cassia grow here, as well as cinnamon and other such spices, that those commodities which in other lands are dedicated as rarities on the altars of the gods, are among the Arabians mere kindling for their cooking pots. And that which elsewhere is found in limited quantities, among these people supplies mattress stuffing for their domestic slaves. (Diodorus Siculus 2.49)

The remarkable variety of environments evident in Yemen comes as a surprise to many visitors. Yet not only is south-west Arabia the most verdant part of the Arabian peninsula, but it also features arid deserts, dry coastal plains and desolate mountains, all of which require the utilisation of specialised techniques of agriculture in order to support human life. When Carsten Niebuhr visited the country in the eighteenth century he declared that in the province of Yemen agriculture seemed to be further advanced than in other parts of the East.¹ As a result of the Indian Ocean monsoon rising over and precipitating its excess moisture over the highlands, rainfall attains as much as 700–900 mm per annum over parts of the highlands. In such areas rainfall is sufficient for one or more crops per year and the countryside appears remarkably verdant, especially during the summer rainy season. In contrast, the surrounding lowlands receive less than 100 mm of rainfall per annum (the interior deserts even less) and they are typified by arid desert conditions. Nevertheless, the high mountain areas which attain elevations of up to 3,700 m above sea level, by intercepting the rain that falls on them, then contribute some of this in the form of groundwater or floods. This in turn helps nourish the human communities situated around the edge of the desert which can harness this bonus for their agricultural needs.

Climate is not static and conditions in south-west Arabia have fluctuated between dry, relatively cooler conditions towards the end of the last glacial period about 18,000 years ago, and a somewhat wetter climate than today between 10,000 and approximately 4,500 years ago. This moist interval resulted in small temporary lakes appearing within the interior deserts and perhaps larger and more extensive marshes and lakes in the highlands.² Although it is not known for certain whether the highlands were forested during the early Postglacial period (between 11,000 and 6,000 years ago), it is almost certain that parts of them were



TOP FIG. 34 Small traditional village in the Yemeni highlands near Dhamār. (Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

ABOVE FIG. 35 Terraced fields on the high Yemeni plateau east of Yarim. (Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

more heavily wooded than today. Another misapprehension about modern Yemen is its population density, which is remarkably high for the Middle East, being in the range of 100–200 persons per sq. km over large parts of the highlands and even greater than 200 persons per sq. km in the southern highlands between Ibb and Ta'izz. The bulk of this population lives on the high plateau and highlands at elevations greater than 1,500 m above sea level. Most live in small villages which dot the landscape at regular intervals throughout the southern highlands (fig. 34).³ The existence of such dense populations implies that the copious rainfall was conducive to high agricultural production which in turn was capable of supporting dense populations from an early date. Hence it should come as no surprise that the mountainous parts of Yemen have provided strong evidence for early village and small-town societies extending back to the early third millennium BC.⁴

Probably one of the most spectacular features of the countryside of highland Yemen are the terraced fields which form dramatic staircases down the slopes of the high intermontane valleys (fig. 35). Rather less dramatic are the relict cultivated enclaves of the Sabaean



FIG. 36 Circular traditional water tank (*birkeh*) north of Dhamār.
(Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

OPPOSITE TOP
FIG. 37 Iron Age or Himyarite threshing floor.
(Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

and Qatabanian oases which can be witnessed from the vantage point of commercial airliners in the form of great ribbons of silt dissected by a gridwork of erosional gullies. These two contrasting features represent an important part of the economic underpinning of the wealth of ancient Yemen, and as one archaeologist has emphasised, the wealth of the Sabaeen state was not only founded upon incense trade but also upon its agriculture.⁵

Agricultural production in Yemen depends on a wide range of water sources, namely seasonal floods (*sayl*), traditional wells (*bīr*) and springs (*ghayl*) which are sometimes developed into underground galleries (*ghayl* or *kidamah*, akin to the Persian *qanat*), as well as surface run-off, cisterns (*birker*) (fig. 36) and rainfall.⁶ These water sources have been ingeniously tapped by both the ancient and recent Yemeni societies to nourish a wide range of types of agriculture. Under ideal circumstances farmers will utilise at least two sources of water so that if one source fails, the other can be brought into use as a reserve. In the wettest areas rainfall is sufficient for cultivation, but because there is often insufficient soil to support the large populations, it has been necessary to build terraced fields on the hillslopes in order to extend the cultivable area. Where rainfall is lower, for example in those areas with less than 300 mm per annum, farmers trap and divert water from adjacent slopes or even fallowed fields and direct it on to their fields. This provides a surplus of water so that, even during a dry year with only 100 mm of rain (about 300 mm being sufficient for a cereal crop), the total amount of water received by the soil will be three to four times the amount that falls directly as rainfall, so that a successful crop can be

achieved in most years. In such cases, because part of the land serves as a run-off area, the terrain can never be cultivated in its entirety, and as a result population density may be lower than in the very wettest areas.

This principle of water-gathering and water-receiving areas is extended even further in the driest lands so that around the desert fringe the entire flow of wādī systems can be intercepted by large dams or water deflectors and directed onto the fields. Such flood or *sayl* agriculture manifests itself in different ways in different areas but it reached its apogee in the Sabaeen period when a series of enormous irrigated oases developed in Qatabān, Saba', Ma'in, Awsān and Ḥaḍramawt.

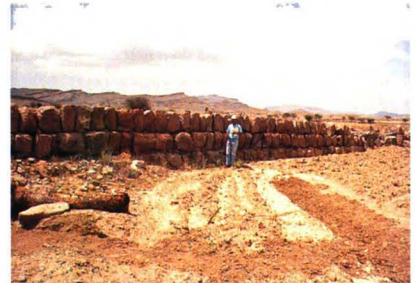
In contrast to many parts of Arabia where archaeological remains are preserved because there has been relatively little subsequent settlement to remove them, the landscape of Yemen has suffered a high rate of attrition. For example, in highland Yemen it is common to find Himyarite stone sculpture reused in traditional buildings because the original buildings have been dismantled and the stonework has been incorporated as secondary decorative elements in later buildings. The same principle holds for the landscape, where older field walls or dams are sometime dismantled and their component stones, often of high-quality masonry, are reused in later terrace walls. As a result of such attrition, earlier archaeological structures dwindle away so that only the most recent features, or those that are most robust, remain. In the irrigated lowlands sluices or other parts of irrigation systems which need to be sturdy to resist highly erosive flow are constructed of masonry. Consequently, only these are likely to endure as conspicuous archaeological remains. The remainder of the water-retaining structures, such as barrages (for example, the actual dam at Mārib), and most of the canals are made of silt or earth. Hence at Mārib it is the fine stonework of the sluices which remain as a noble fort-like structure, whereas only part of the dam survives on the bed of the Wādī Dhana.

TERRACED AGRICULTURE IN THE HIGHLANDS

Not only does terraced agriculture form the most eye-catching feature of the Yemeni landscape, it also supports a significant part of the population of the highland valleys and plateaux. The history of terraced agriculture is still poorly understood, but in the Levant terraced fields are considered to have become an important part of the landscape only in the early first millennium BC. In contrast, in Yemen, the earliest-recorded terrace wall formed part of a small buried field dated to a little after 4000 BC. Because this has been sealed below some 6–7 m of sediment and has yielded a radiocarbon date of 3630–3955 BC, its early

from the fields, often on a high spur where there is sufficient wind for winnowing the crop. The earliest-known threshing floors appear to date from the late third or early second millennium BC, but the most elegant are rather later in date being probably Iron Age or Himyarite. Such threshing floors are large, usually rectangular platforms, the component stones of which have been laid in carefully set rows (fig. 37).

An advantage of the agricultural landscape of the Yemen highlands is the very flexibility and sustainability of terraced agriculture. Terrace walls can be built by a family; therefore, even if there is a political crisis, fields can be maintained so that agricultural production can continue through prolonged periods of time. On the other hand, between the first century BC and the sixth century AD, when the highlands became the centre of the Himyarite state, there was a flurry of dam-building activity. These often massive masonry structures (fig. 38) enabled seasonal floods to be harnessed in order to increase the productivity of the agricultural economy. In this system water was trapped behind large dams of well-dressed stone blocks and guided to fields downslope to increase agricultural productivity in selected cultivated enclaves. In most cases the dams have been breached as a result of high floods and have therefore fallen out of use, whereas in the valley of the Himyarite capital of Ṣafār, Miquel Barceló and his team of archaeologists have recorded



ABOVE FIG. 38

The Himyarite dam of Sedd al-Ajmar.
(Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

RIGHT FIG. 39 Long dam-like cross-valley wall in Wādī Shalalah near Yarim. (Photo: T.J. Wilkinson)

date seems likely.⁷ Other less-well-dated examples of terraced fields in the highlands remain in the form of faint horizontal lines of stones on hillsides below Bronze Age sites. From their physical association with Bronze Age sites these fields may be dated to the late third or early second millennium BC. Other examples are later, belonging to the Iron Age, Himyarite and Islamic periods, and it is now clear that terraced fields were constantly being built and rebuilt over the last 6,000 years. In addition to the fields themselves, other agricultural installations exist in the form of threshing floors which usually occur at a convenient distance

several small systems of dam irrigation which have continued in use to the present day, i.e. through some 1,500–2,000 years.⁸ Many of the dams and large monumental 'cross-valley walls' (or *harrah*: fig. 39) remain encapsulated in the landscape today. Such features are well known to the local communities and they retain ancient names, many of which can be shown to be Himyarite in origin.

Some two thousand years ago when the Himyarite agricultural system was at its peak the Yemeni highlands had a dual agricultural economy consisting of both terraced fields, which represented the long-term

cultivation, and monumental dams, providing supplementary irrigation for estates and small towns. Although relatively little is known about highland irrigation systems it is tempting to speculate that some may have supplied water to garden areas in addition to fields. For example, the late Robert Serjeant has described fourteenth-century-AD Rasulid gardens around Ta'izz and elsewhere which included 'royal domes', sultanic residences and pools or *birkeh*.⁹

Because a single flood could sweep dams away, dam-irrigated agricultural systems were much more fragile than either those of terraced agriculture or traditional flood agriculture. Consequently, when such systems went out of use, agricultural production often reverted to a combination of terraced and seasonal flood (*sayl*) agriculture. Nevertheless, such an optimistic scenario for the longevity of terraced agriculture must be tempered by a warning that these agricultural systems are only sustainable as long as they are maintained. Lack of maintenance can result in entire terraces and their deposits being eroded away down the hillsides.¹⁰ That such catastrophes have happened in the past is well illustrated by relict Islamic fields that have been buried by tons of gravel eroded from destroyed terraces located up the valley.

FLOOD AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS OF THE DESERT FRINGE OASES

In contrast to the highlands, the agricultural systems of Saba' and the neighbouring South Arabian states were much more monolithic, being based around large flood diversion dams or other water diversion systems upon which the entire agricultural area depended for its irrigation water. Because these systems formed the economic foundations of the ancient South Arabian states, their history and functioning is much better known than those of the highlands, and a number of fundamental studies have been made by German, French, American, Italian, Swiss and British teams.¹¹ These systems required a very high investment of labour and capital to maintain and rejuvenate them. Consequently, if a dam was swept away by a flood, unless sufficient labour could be remobilised cultivated enclaves would stay out of use, with the result that the entire agricultural system and the cities that depended upon them, would remain fossilised in the landscape.

An immediate problem that arises from flood-run-off agriculture is that by utilising the annual flood and leading it via sluices and distribution canals on to the fields, the fields gradually accumulate thick deposits of silt. Brunner has estimated that irrigation silts built up at a rate of around 11 mm per year.¹² Such rapid rates of sedimentation have resulted in the accumulation of considerable depths of sediment: up

to 30 m in the Mārib oasis, 11 m in the Wādī Markha¹³ and 15–18 m in the Wādī Bayḥān.¹⁴ For the Mārib area this implies that some 2,700 years were required for the sediments to build up, so that the beginning of irrigation agriculture must date back to the third millennium BC, a point that has recently been confirmed by radiocarbon dating of charcoal from the deposits in the Wādī Markha.¹⁵ Although these deep archives of silt are a bonus for archaeologists, they provided a problem for the original farmers because the gradual accumulation of silts resulted in the level of fields rising. Accordingly, it was necessary to build ever higher dams and sluices until a point of diminishing returns was reached when this became impracticable and canal gradients decreased to the point where it was virtually impossible to conduct the flow.

The vast oases of silt that form the remains of these irrigated field areas are conspicuous because of their characteristic gridwork of intersecting erosional gullies. These have been scored into the silts as a result of selective erosion along the original irrigation ditches that distributed water within the fields. This grid of gullies allows the area of individual fields to be estimated to around 0.35 to 2 hectares in area. Under the agricultural regime that prevailed at the time, this area was probably sufficient to provide food for a family of five to seven individuals. As a result of their steady aggradation these great accumulations of silt have become veritable agricultural museums. Geoarchaeological work on these sediments by a German archaeological team has enabled the scale of the irrigation systems to be estimated and many specific details of ancient Sabaean irrigation practice to be recognised.¹⁶ Plough furrows were spaced some 30–35 cm apart and ploughing penetrated to a depth of 10–15 cm, i.e. to a depth comparable to traditional practice; indeed, a Sabaean funerary stela inscribed with the names Yahmad Qashafrīqan, Hassat and Khalkharib depicts in one register the scene of a kilted man with bare feet driving a pair of oxen harnessed to a plough.¹⁷ More explicit are the 'ghosts' of the bowls of trees which appear as concentric circles of silt and clay, sometimes raised as stubs above the surrounding soils. These appear to be the remains of small circular irrigation basins dug around individual trees. The alignment of such circles or stubs is usually in rows, which suggests that the trees were deliberately planted as orchard trees. Moreover, casts of roots in the soil give an idea of the different crops planted. These included larger roots of what appear to have been palms and the roots of possible fruit trees, as well as fine root hairs of annual garden crops such as cereals or fodder crops.

These relict agricultural landscapes cover vast areas of terrain and Ueli Brunner has estimated that irrigated silts extend over some 44,500 hectares of valley floor between Shabwa in the east and Mārib in the west.¹⁸ Such is their scale that there is even an old South Arabian story to the effect that a horse rider could travel from Mārib in every direction for seven days without leaving green pastures. Flood irrigation agriculture also forms part of the traditional agricultural economy of the Tihāma coastal plain, and in the medieval Rasulid period the province of Zabid supplied the largest tax revenue of this entire plain.¹⁹ Traces of these irrigation systems have recently been revealed in the vicinity of the town.²⁰

ANCIENT CROPS

The crops which contributed to the agricultural landscape of the third millennium BC have been recorded by means of the impressions of grains left in potsherds excavated from sites in the Khawlān area, located to the south-east of Ṣana'a'. Crops included two types of wheat and two types of barley, as well as (less confidently) sorghum and millet.²¹ If the two last-named cereals were cropped in the Bronze Age this suggests that the landscape may have yielded both a winter crop of wheat and barley and a summer crop of sorghum or millet. This would obviously have increased the agricultural productivity of the land considerably. Furthermore, the presence of two date stones from sites in the Khawlān raises the possibility that the Bronze Age oases of south-west Arabia, like those of Oman, also included date palms.

Recently recovered charred plant remains from Bronze Age sites in the highlands also supply evidence for the cultivation of wheat, barley and some legumes, but due to the altitude (over 2,000 m above sea level) palm trees would not be expected. By the Sabaeen period a wider range of plants was being cultivated in the Khawlān area; these included cereals from west Asia (such as barley, oats and millet) and others from Africa (*teff*), the latter being a typical plant food in Ethiopia today. For the same area there is also a suggestion that vines were already being grown during the first millennium BC. To these must also be added wheat, barley, sorghum, sesame and dates.²² After the medieval period the range of agricultural plants increased considerably to include qāt (*Catha edulis*) and coffee, both of which grow on terraced fields in the highlands. In addition, medieval agriculture included a wide range of citrus trees that are normally regarded as having been introduced in the early Islamic period.

The grape is also grown in parts of Yemen, notably in areas of the highlands north of Ṣana'a', and traditionally wine was made by some of the Jewish

communities.²³ Customarily in the Khawlān vines are cultivated on irrigated terraces and, interestingly, they grow entwined around columns or heaps of stones. The latter are tantalisingly similar in shape and distribution to similar features recorded in areas of run-off cultivation in the Negev desert, where the interpretation of these features has varied according to the interpreter to include the promotion of run-off for valley floor fields, as well as (in Yemen) mounds for growing grapes. During the Sabaeen period grapes were certainly grown for wine and in one noteworthy case 300 camel-loads of wine were delivered to workers who were undertaking repairs on the Mārib dam.²⁴

By the medieval period much of modern Yemeni agricultural practice was in place, and thanks to a remarkable document dating to the thirteenth century AD an enormous amount is now known about the agricultural practice of the Rasulid period.²⁵ Not only does this describe the rich variety of cultivated plants which existed in Arabia Felix – apricots, apples, plums, sugarcane, sorghum, walnuts, mulberries, grapes and figs, to name but a selection – it also gives details of the annual agricultural cycle.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent studies of the Yemeni landscapes demonstrate that cultivation has a longer history than was previously suspected. Terraced agriculture, or at least some form of wādī floor cultivation, extends back to the fourth millennium BC, and seasonal flood agriculture to at least the third millennium BC. It has also become evident that the dynamics of these systems have varied to a considerable degree, a situation which must have had considerable influence on the ancient communities that maintained them. Whereas the massive irrigation systems of the desert fringe oases were very vulnerable to major floods, which could destroy the entire system in one short, sharp episode, those of the highlands were much more resilient to external shocks. Not only were terraced fields easier to maintain than those with dams, but also when maintained, they resulted in a remarkably stable landscape. The terrace benches absorbed much of the rainfall that fell so that floods in the valley floors were less intense and less likely to inflict damage on valley-floor features such as dams. Consequently, it seems to be in the heavily terraced valleys of the Ṣafār area that many dams remain intact, whereas in other less heavily terraced areas the massive floods generated have swept many dams away.²⁶

Evidence for irrigation, agriculture and wine

119 Sabaeen limestone stela commemorating the digging of a well

Wādī Akhīrr

Mid-1st century AD

H 35 cm, W 53 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 672

The Radmān tribe of the highlands commemorated the digging of a well in the Wādī Akhīrr, a tributary of the Wādī Bayhān, not far from the heart of the Qatabanian kingdom; the territory of Radmān was expanding east at the expense of Qatabanian-held land. Radmān had previously been part of the Qatabanian kingdom, but during the mid-first century AD they claimed independence and, like Ḥimyar, adopted the Sabaeen rather than Qatabanian dialect (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 182). The inscription reads, 'Wātār Yarta son of Ma'āhir and dhū-Khawlān dug, built, completed and clad his new well Nahār in his valley Mawharān, in Akhīrr, colony of Radmān.'



119

120 Limestone inscription commemorating the construction of a water basin at Mārib

Mārib

End of 8th century BC

H 25 cm, W 33.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 8

The boustrophedon inscription is bordered on the right by a long line and reads: 'Lahay has purchased and constructed his reservoir basin', implying that it served as a document of legal ownership (Seipel ed. 1998, 90).



120

121 Calcite-alabaster cornice with vine scroll

Mārib

2nd century AD

H 22.5 cm, W 130 cm, TH 7 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1966-12-13.1 = 134886

Vine scroll decoration was a particularly popular form of architectural decoration in



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the Classical world: a similar style of decoration occurred, for instance, on the north portico of the second-century-AD Sanctuary of Bel in Palmyra (Seyrig 1940, 313–14, fig. 22). This form of decoration was occasionally also employed on portable items such as incense burners (see cat. 109).

122 Carved limestone architectural decoration

Zafār

H 64.5 cm, W 47.5 cm, TH 18 cm

2nd–3rd centuries AD

The National Museum, Ṣana'ā, YM 601

123 Bronze dipper ladle handles ending in ibex or calf heads

Provenance uncertain

L 11.2 cm, 17.1 cm, 20.4 cm (max.)

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1930-6-13.25 = 122029;

1930-6-13.24 = 122028; 1930-6-13.23 = 122027

Presented by Mrs Gowan

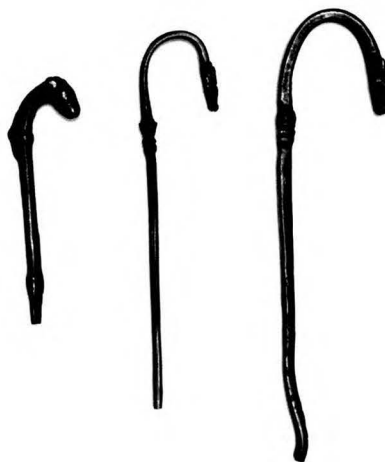
Dipper ladles were introduced across the Near East during the Achaemenid period as part of metal drinking sets, the ladles being used to scoop the wine into drinking bowls (Moorey 1980). This form of ladle dates between the fifth century BC and first century AD, and plain miniature bronze ladles with a total length of 5–6.5 cm were excavated in the cemetery at Tamna' (Cleveland 1965, 125, 127, pl. 93).¹ Viticulture is implied by South Arabian texts (see this volume, Chapter 7) and eighteen different cultivated varieties of wine grape were described by the early Islamic author al-Hamdani (1938, 42–3); remains of grapes were found, along with seed impressions of barley, broomcorn millet, corn-cockle, cumin, flax, oats, sesame and sorrel, at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd (Soderstrom 1969). Furthermore, a number of South Arabian inscriptions refer to the drinking of grape and date wine. Building

inscriptions from Mārib refer to the delivery of consignments of 200 camel-loads of date wine and 430 camel-loads of grape wine to workers repairing the dam in AD 440; a decade later, another inscription refers to the delivery of as much as 670 camel-loads of grape wine (Schippmann 2001, 85). The existence of a flourishing wine industry in ancient southern Arabia explains the reference in the *Periplus* to the import of wine being limited to a small quantity of high-quality wine from the Latakia region of north Syria. Thus the discovery of amphorae at Qāni' (see cat. 116) may reflect the use of these vessels as conveniently multi-purpose transport containers for oil rather than wine.

1 A bronze dipper ladle handle terminating in an ibex head, and said to come from the Jawf region, is displayed in the Archaeology Department Museum in the University of Ṣana'ā'. Others were found at Wādī Ḍura' (Breton and Bafaqih 1993, 29, figs 32, 35–8).



122



123

Arts, Crafts and Industries

WILLIAM D. GLANZMAN

Since they [the South Arabians] have never for ages suffered the ravages of war because of their secluded position, and since there is an abundance of both gold and silver in their country, especially in Saba', where the royal palace is situated, they have embossed goblets of every description, made of silver and gold, couches and tripods with silver feet, and every other furnishing of incredible costliness, and halls encircled by large columns, some of them gilded, and others having silver figures on their capitals. Their ceilings and doors they have decorated with sunken recesses set with close-packed gems. Thus they have made the structure of their houses in every part marvellous for its opulence, for some parts they have constructed of silver and gold, others of ivory and the most showy precious stones or whatever else men esteem most highly. (Diodorus Siculus 3.47)



FIG. 40 Reused columns in the mosque of Sulayman ibn Daoud, Mārib.
(Photo: Fred Walter)

With the legendary visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon in Jerusalem, ancient South Arabia enters into the realm of our historical awareness, and we come to associate this culturally rich region with three commodities: aromatic substances, gold and precious stones, each of which has a bearing on the arts, crafts and industries of the region.

The ancient Yemenis exploited the raw materials located nearest their communities. Igneous, metamorphic and sedimentary rocks form the mountains that surround the Ramlat as-Sab'atayn desert, creating an austere environment. Perforating these mountains and flowing either towards the coast or into the hinterland are major wādī systems,¹ at the terminus of which arose the capital cities of each of the famous five kingdoms of South Arabia. The differences between raw materials available and those used are partly dependent upon the preservation conditions at a site – principally air, bacteria, moisture and salinity conditions – and upon cultural factors. Yemen has excellent preservation conditions in the hinterland with respect to air and moisture, although the soils in and around the Ramlat as-Sab'atayn are hypersaline and contribute to the decomposition of saline-sensitive materials. The humid conditions of the Tihāma and the southern coastline are less forgiving for many organic materials. The archaeologically attestable cultural factors are reuse and recycling. Reuse is common in the region, especially for costly materials; even ancient limestone columns are reused in the mosque of Sulayman ibn Daoud in old Mārib (fig. 40).² Recycling, like reuse, is common and may occur for the same reasons. Often, the artefact may be refashioned for an entirely different purpose, such as the stela with a hole cut into its dedication text (cat. 215). On sanctuary sites recycling becomes a means of religiously sanctioned disposal.³

Many modern objects exhibit a high degree of cultural continuity with the past in medium, technology

and form, as well as function,⁴ such as the production of leather containers and footwear. In some sheltered burial contexts from pre-Islamic times we encounter leather sandals, and bags containing the mummified remains of ancient Yemenis (fig. 41).⁵ However no studies of their production and comparisons to the modern craft have yet been undertaken. Of special interest in the Yemen are the animal and plant fibres used to make clothing and weave into containers. Their forms and decoration today are often distinguished by region, tribe and social standing.⁶ Ancient examples of textiles and basketry recovered by excavation, however, are so rare – such as ancient baskets holding frankincense⁷ – that we can only wonder if regional and tribal affiliations were

FIG. 41 Leather shoe from a mid-1st-millennium-BC burial, Shibām al-Ghirās. (Photo: S. al-Zubir)



recognisable by form and décor then, too. All of these materials, and probably many more which have not survived, were exploited in antiquity within South Arabia, and the uses of the products made from them varied from the monumental to the mundane.

PILLARS, COLUMNS AND ARCHES

Monolithic limestone pillars are truly a distinctive and characteristic Yemeni feature of ancient monumental architecture.⁸ Often the pillars attain a height of over 5 m. Such columns are estimated to weigh over several tonnes apiece, and highlight the skill with which the ancient Yemeni mason practised his craft. That so many still stand today is testament to superior engineering skills, all the more impressive because they were built without the aid of the metal clamp system employed by the master masons of the Greeks and Romans.⁹ Although quarry locations and exploitation have yet to be studied in a thorough manner throughout Yemen, some quarries have been identified in the Mārib region.¹⁰

True columns made of limestone are also characteristic of ancient Yemen and their decorative elements are very distinctive.¹¹ Several styles exist in this rich repertoire: an architectural or 'geometric' style¹² influenced by wooden constructions; and the 'naturalistic style' with its many floral variations (cats 194, 196).¹³ The vine motif in particular has received some attention yet the combinations remain distinct to Yemen.¹⁴

It became very popular as a decorative motif on other objects, all of which seem to have been used either as architectural decoration¹⁵ or as grave memorials.¹⁶ One of the finest examples is found on an arch fragment from a palace at Zafār (cat. 122).¹⁶

Yemen is full of surprises in architectural decoration, and one of these is the unique portrayal of standing women framed in panels of geometric motifs on the pillars in the temple of 'Athtar at as-Sawdā' in the Jawf (cat. 188). One of the most spectacular decorative combinations is on a column and its capital from a palace at Shabwa, with its winged griffin on the capital being a 'Mediterraneanised' version of the massive Assyrian and Babylonian protective spirits found on wall panels at the entrances of their palaces (cat. 194). Yet the playful position of the griffin, here standing before a metallic vessel, is paralleled elsewhere in textile, metal vessel and pottery designs of Late Antique date in Egyptian and Persian art, and it continues into Early Islamic times. A rounded capital, presumably from a palace at Shibām-Kawkaban (cat. 196), provides a similar case whereby its floral motifs are 'Hellenised', Near Eastern in origin and reworked in South Arabia, rather than being slavish copies of foreign influence.

Classical inspiration might be behind some floral elements, as the dated examples all seem to fall within the period of intense Mediterranean commercial interests in the region as reflected by the mid-first-century-AD guide, the *Periplus*.¹⁷ Some items which represent Mediterranean influence may be imported, such as a bronze colonnette support from Tamnā' carrying an 'Egyptianised' Corinthian capital (cat. 156).

DEDICATORY STELAE, WALL PANELS AND FRIEZES

Besides the monumental achievements executed in limestone, we have the smaller monuments cut from limestone and calcite-alabaster which can be divided into three general groups: dedicatory stelae, wall panels and friezes. When inscribed, they occur as either a 'votive offering', asking the intercession or assistance of the deity in some matter, or as an *ex voto*, thanking the deity for answering one's prayers or otherwise interceding on one's behalf (cat. 27).¹⁸

Limestone stelae are carved from single blocks, and have many shapes and designs. Most were erected vertically and placed as dedications within sanctuaries. The key feature of this type of monument is its combination of artistic and technical elements: the execution of a small pillar or masonry block, dressed differently from most masonry, and decorated on its front face. That face is dressed in a finer manner than masonry blocks and is clearly the intended visible side, while the rear is left in a rougher form because it was

placed against or near a wall. Stelae often carried bronze statuettes of the dedicant identified in the inscription.¹⁹ Some also carry decorative schemes in the form of monograms,²⁰ floral motifs (cat. 214) or other religious symbols whose meanings are still unclear (cats 202, 206).²¹

Wall panels usually occur in calcite-alabaster and once adorned the walls of sanctuaries. They tend to have side or frontal views of zoomorphic characters, usually in a symmetrical arrangement flanking a text.²² Their size and shape, the content of their inscriptions and the few examples recovered from excavation demonstrate their religious character. Wall panels in limestone and calcite-alabaster were cut as large slabs. Archaeological data show that most slabs were roughed

window, where the wall was exposed partly to sunlight. The top of the panel normally has a series of horizontal grooves cut to form sharply protruding triangular-shaped ridges resembling partially opened wooden louvres of a shuttered window. Beneath this is usually found a flat zone and some projections, referred to as dentils or *regulae*. Lower down is a series of criss-cross recessed elements resembling a wooden lattice frame.²⁷ This decoration is also common on other objects, including miniature versions (cat. 217).²⁸ The inspirational source is still uncertain, but since wood is well preserved only under special conditions, such as in the burnt château royal and certain residential buildings at Shabwa, it could have been a more widely used construction medium than previously thought.²⁹

FIG. 42 Part of the exterior of a building on the citadel of Old Mārib showing reuse of ancient masonry and a decorative ibex frieze. (Photo: Brian Moorman)



out at the quarry site, while final detail work occurred at the place of construction.

Friezes cut in calcite-alabaster and limestone occur as blocks depicting zoomorphic figures, especially the ibex or mountain goat (cat. 211).²³ The cutting and dressing on these examples make it clear that they once adorned the tops of architectural features such as walls and statue bases. Sometimes we find them reused in later construction (fig. 42).²⁴

THE FALSE WINDOW

A characteristic feature of monumental South Arabian architectural decoration in limestone, especially in the territory of Saba', is the use of the recessed niche and the 'false window' motif (cat. 189).²⁵ This combination is clearly meant to replicate architectural façades of buildings. Similarities in Mesopotamia and Egypt from the fourth millennium BC onward show this practice is a common response to the intense climate of the region, with the masons creating a play between light and shadow on the exterior surfaces of important buildings.

The 'false window' found on both the exterior and interior façades of monumental buildings is another unique Yemeni architectural decoration.²⁶ The idea that it represents a window is found in several of its components. The ensemble is represented as a tall rectangular panel and is always inset from the surface of the façade. It is often placed on a wall at the level of a

INCENSE BURNERS AND ALTARS

Perhaps the most familiar South Arabian artefact is the incense burner (fig. 43). The medium of choice is limestone, although examples occur in calcite-alabaster and clay. Its intricate carving often has the same decorative elements as the capitals of columns and pillars as well as architectural façades (cat. 103), although the shape varies widely.³⁰ One common variety is the pyramidal pedestal burner. The function of the burner continues until modern times: a receptacle for placing frankincense kernels on hot coals, creating a dense smoke which acts as a fumigant after meals and during special ceremonies.³¹ Sometimes the interior of these burners is blackened from use, and some examples still carry traces of the odorous but melted resin of frankincense. When found in sanctuaries, many burners bear the inscription of the dedicant.

Closely related to the burner in function and decorative style is the altar (cat. 210). Many occur in different shapes and decorative styles. One of the most common is a stepped platform altar (cat. 207), square or rectangular in shape and cut to exhibit an architectural façade.³² Since most come from sites with ancient or modern disturbance, we are not yet in a position to know precisely how, where and under what circumstances such altars were used.

Table altars reveal some of the finest examples of South Arabian craftsmanship. They are made from limestone and calcite-alabaster and cut to create a square or rectangular flat block or slab with sides usually raised slightly, forming a rim. The space contained by the rim is generally plain yet finely chiselled, while one side of the table's rim is normally cut to act as a channel for a liquid to flow off the table. It usually passes through a projecting spout, ending with the head of an animal and often a bull (cats 195, 209, 216). These zoomorphic images represent the deity to whom the sanctuary is dedicated, and suggest that the



FIG. 43 Incense burners from the Bar'ân temple at Mārib (cats 105–7) and possibly Dhamār (cat. 108).

liquid which once flowed from them became sanctified. Only a few examples have been found relatively intact within sanctuaries.³³ Sometimes table altars have been recycled in a way which suggests their religious character continues,³⁴ while miniature examples are found in tombs (cats 294–5). In general, the calcite-alabaster specimens are cut and polished, as the medium lends itself well to this, while the limestone examples are carefully hewn with a fine chisel. Pigment was applied to both media in order to enhance details of the table or spout.

GRAVE STELAE AND STATUETTES

Another distinctive feature of South Arabian art is the grave stela, of which there are four general types: a tall panel stela; a smaller panel stela; relief plaques; and face plaques. The size and opulence of these mobile monuments differ, suggesting that some artists and craftsmen were more skilled than others, hence production costs varied. The accompanying inscriptions, some stating title and name of the deceased, indicate that the wealth and status of the patron also varied. Examples without title generally focus on the lineage or the place of origin of the individual. Uninscribed specimens tend to be smaller, and may suggest their patrons held lesser wealth or status.

The tall panel stela is a multimedia production characteristic of the kingdom of Saba'. It is composed

of a tall limestone frame, usually decorated, with an exquisitely carved alabaster head inserted within a recessed slot and affixed into place with a plaster or cement compound (cat. 277). The finest examples carry an imitation of an architectural façade over the recess, and the panel above bears an inscription which identifies the deceased. The original placement of the stela is still unresolved since the archaeologically recovered examples come from recycled contexts at Mārib.³⁵ A detailed study of this stela type has yet to take place, but it seems that the variation in sculpted heads may be an attempt at a realistic portrayal of the deceased.

The smaller relief panel is usually cut from a slab of calcite-alabaster and often represents a scene in which the deceased is rendered within an architectural façade, copying grave stelae found in the eastern Mediterranean region during the Roman period (cat. 142).³⁶ Here, the execution of the human form is somewhat disproportional, yet fluid. Other examples in limestone and calcite-alabaster lack the precision of execution and detail of the human form, so a realistic depiction of the deceased is lacking. The sketchy and possibly standardised representation of the human form is similar to the depiction of women on decorated pillars (cat. 188).

Relief plaques from cemeteries and other contexts are especially common in the kingdom of Qatabān.³⁷ All examples seem to be highly stylised representations, with little or no sense of realism in portraiture. Several variations exist in the human form, ranging from fully rounded facial depictions to highly stylised eyes and nose renderings. While their full frontal position is reminiscent of Syrian and central Arabian art in the first to third centuries AD,³⁸ the depictions of the body are nearly identical to the standing and seated statuettes. The execution of the rounded examples is exceptionally fine, and calcite-alabaster is the medium of choice.³⁹

Limestone seems to have been favoured for face plaques, although some occur in calcite-alabaster (cat. 276). They are always highly stylised rather than realistic portraits of the deceased. Excavations in the cemetery at the Maḥram Bilqis in Mārib have uncovered similar iconography carved on the exterior walls of mausolea (see fig. 64).⁴⁰ The South Arabian face plaque has been suggested as the inspiration for 'eye idol' deity plaques for the Nabataeans, the north Arabian caravaneers.⁴¹ Perhaps related to the face plaques are highly abstract stelae which may be plain (cat. 283) or incised, and some have protomes affixed to their front.⁴²

Sculpture in the round was used to depict the deceased elite within the kingdom of Qatabān, and perhaps elsewhere. The examples are of two types: bust pegs which insert into blocks of limestone or calcite-alabaster, and standing or seated statuettes. Peg inserts come in a range of sizes, again perhaps relating to the

wealth and status of the deceased. In all cases the neck length is exaggerated and its bottom is often roughened, facilitating insertion into its base (cat. 273).

Seated and standing statuettes, executed in calcite-alabaster or limestone, are common in the kingdom of Qatabān.⁴³ The torso has a stiff appearance and is always disproportionate to the finely carved head (cat. 130). In all cases, the head seems to provide a naturalistic representation of the deceased: the shape of the face, and details of beards, moustaches and coiffure vary tremendously. The eyes hold insets of precious materials or pastes, and some examples have additions of jewellery. The arms are often outstretched at the elbow as if to carry or clasp objects. They often have inscriptions providing the name of the deceased. Many variations of this style are known, yet few have been recovered from excavations.⁴⁴

Closely related in style and execution are arguably the finest stone sculptures in South Arabian art: the representations of the kings of Awsān (cats 34–6). Here the details of the faces and dress are so individualised that it is compelling to believe they are accurate representations of people.⁴⁵ Some fragmentary pieces of three-dimensional calcite-alabaster sculpture similar to this genre and the standing and seated sculptures have now been found in excavations of sanctuaries,⁴⁶ raising the possibility that some examples may have been votive objects rather than funerary art.

METALWORKING AND BRONZE STATUARY

All great civilisations have left a remarkable array of objects in metal, and South Arabia is no exception. Metalworking, especially in copper, was a craft in which the South Arabian kingdoms excelled. Unlike neighbouring Oman, where the famed copper mines of ancient Magan are found, Yemen has no tradition in literary sources as a place of copper exploitation or production. However, archaeological evidence proves it was a major production centre for numerous metal products.

The most common metal encountered is an alloy of copper, commonly called bronze. South Arabia is now known to have been a major centre for bronze production, judging from the sheer quantity of objects and especially their debris recovered from archaeological excavation. That debris is in the form of slag, which is the waste product obtained from smelting rock to extract ore, and can also occur from melting ingots or remelting (recycling) of metal objects.⁴⁷

A number of bronze vessels have been found in excavations. The best complete vessels are large cauldrons and buckets,⁴⁸ some of which bear inscriptions cast on their surface in raised relief (cat. 166). Many cast miniature vessels have been recovered from cemetery

contexts: their shapes certainly imitate larger specimens (cats 297–9). One unique category of bronze objects is the dedicatory plaque or tablet (cats 31, 219–20). It is a flat rectilinear piece cast by the lost-wax method, with texts and iconography usually in raised relief. The texts commonly invoke a deity. Some notable examples carry images ranging from rows of sphinxes or recumbent camels to hands and feet; one exceptional specimen from Tamna' has a complete projection of a hand extending a *phiale* or offering dish (cat. 219). Casting debris probably from plaque production was found at Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil, near the mortuary temple at the cemetery of the Qatabanian capital of Tamna'.⁴⁹ Some examples are framed in the same manner as limestone and alabaster wall panels associated with sanctuaries, which suggests that they served the same function (cat. 26). On more complete specimens we find the holes for attachment, demonstrating they once adorned walls or other architectural features,⁵⁰ and thus explaining the many rhythmically placed holes in the pillars and walls of the Awwām temple (Maḥram Bilqis) in Mārib.⁵¹

Coins are historically the most important category of metal objects, as they usually bear the king's name or mint name of origin, and are commonly found on historic period sites (cats 38–87). They appear in Yemen as imports and then imitations of Greek coins after the Hellenisation of the Near East following the invasion of Alexander the Great. They soon develop their own iconography and replace Greek script with old South Arabian. From them the archaeologist can develop a relative and absolute chronology for a site's history. Coins are also a valuable source of iconography, and when analysed for their metal composition, they can also suggest trends in the ancient economy.⁵²

With the discovery over half a century ago of the famous statue of Ma'dikarib at the Maḥram Bilqis in Mārib (cat. 24), the lion riders (cats 152–3) and Lady Bar'at at Tamna' (cat. 158), and several other well-known examples of bronze sculptures,⁵³ scholars began to identify the presence of foreign influences, most of them Hellenised eastern Mediterranean from the fourth century BC onward, in this indigenous art form.⁵⁴ South Arabia's statuary in bronze is now regarded as a major art form, with the recent restoration of the larger-than-life-size statues discovered in 1931 at Nakhl al-Ḥamrā' (cats 148–50).⁵⁵ Their style and inscriptions demonstrate that a strong Hellenistic influence is found in sculptures of South Arabian kings executed with the assistance of a sculptor named Phokas, whose inscription in Greek ('Phokas made [this]') is engraved on the knee of one statue (fig. 44). It accompanies a dedicatory inscription in old South Arabian engraved on its torso. These specimens represent the creation of a joint effort by a Hellenised individual, perhaps an itinerant Greek

sculptor, working in South Arabia. One key stylistic feature that separates these specimens from mainstream sculpture of the Hellenistic and Roman periods is the rendering of the hair.

The finest bronze sculptures so far recovered come from the sanctuary excavations at Jabal al-Lawdh. Here, the best examples again demonstrate a strong tie to the Mediterranean in the Hellenised themes and influence in their subject, their execution and even the details of their dress and coiffure, such as the bust of Athena (cat. 162) or the goddess Isis-Fortuna (cat. 163). Others

FIG. 44 Restored copy of bronze statue of Thar'an, 2nd–4th centuries AD. (Mainz, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Germany).



show a definite Egyptian influence as represented by the sphinx (cat. 165); this example, however, also carries an inscription in old South Arabian. In all cases, these large sculptures were cast using the lost-wax technique, in which a wax model is made on a clay core (often still visible on the finished object), then the whole covered over with clay, leaving only two major holes: one leading into the wax to permit molten metal to be poured into the casing, and the other to allow the gases from the vapourised wax to exit.⁵⁶

Human figurines in bronze show a style unique to South Arabia, and a technology similar to the bronze figurines of the Mediterranean and Near Eastern regions (cat. 227). Many of these figurines are highly stylised, without detail and flat in appearance. Other examples are far more intricate in their detail of dress, coiffure and stance, and could be made only by creating a special mould for lost-wax casting, reflecting different stylistic influences (cats 154, 223–4). Even animal figurines seem to be distinct in depiction.

Several of these carry incised inscriptions on their torsos, most of which show that they were votive offerings or *ex votos* to a deity in a sanctuary, just like their larger counterparts (cat. 223).

Instead of reflecting a strong trade in sculptures of Mediterranean origin, as documented in the *Periplus* (28:9.17),⁵⁷ most of the bronzes seem to be the products of local sculptors; a few are products by itinerant foreign craftsmen,⁵⁸ and some may be imported objects. This situation is reflected also in recent excavations of sanctuaries where bronze items abound, as does slag and other debris from casting bronze.⁵⁹

Other bronze objects held special status, either made clear by their excavated context, such as the inscribed trough from the Maḥram Bilqis in Mārib,⁶⁰ or by the inscriptions incised upon them (cat. 223). This is true even for weaponry such as arrowheads or lance points (cat. 222). Their inscriptions recall a practice which was widespread in the Near East, that of dedicating personal items to a deity.⁶¹ Not so for the last unique class of object, the stamp (cats 240–41). It is now found with greater frequency in excavations and seems to have been used on a variety of items, including plaster bungs that once sealed jars for wine or other liquids.⁶² This idea seems to have been foreign to South Arabia, and probably arose by commercial contact with Egypt and the Mediterranean, where the practice of inscribing or stamping plaster bungs to seal wine amphorae was common;⁶³ in pre-Islamic times the production and consumption of wine in South Arabia, and even its trade, was widespread by the first century AD (cat. 123).⁶⁴

Bronze was not the only metal to be used. Iron is common in the form of nails, spikes and even rivets and wire; and bimetallic objects such as jugs, bowls and daggers occur in silver and bronze or other metals, as in the cache from Grave 3 in Wādī Ḍura' (cats 305–6). Gold, however, is rare; rings, necklaces and other jewellery items are known, and some of them carry old South Arabian inscriptions and iconography demonstrating they were made in the region (cats 131–7, 308).

SOFTSTONE DOMESTIC WARES

One of the most basic items in an ancient culture is its utilitarian ware. In South Arabia cooking bowls, lamps and other humble items are carved from a very soft-stone: a schist composed largely of talc and chlorite with some accessory minerals, sometimes known as soapstone or steatite (fig. 45). This schist has a long and important tradition in the Yemen. One of the most commonly encountered forms is the cooking bowl, whose function continues today as the container of choice for making the traditional Yemeni dish known as *hilba* or *salta*. Most of these examples have



FIG. 45 Carved softstone vessels, Tamna', 1st century AD. (*American Foundation for the Study of Man, Washington; AFSM TC 1957, TS 834, TS 52*)

traces of carbonaceous residue on their exterior, demonstrating their function. The form of the cooking bowl has evolved through time, starting with a deep hemispherical bowl with some distinct surface treatments. Later examples typical of the first millennium AD have a shallow depth and a sharply angled form. That type continues today and is manufactured in various centres such as Saada. In origin, however, it derives from a ceramic form which it imitates in shape and function.⁶⁵

CERAMIC VESSELS

Unlike some cultures, pottery manufacture in southern Arabia did not develop into a major art form. Stone and metal were far more popular as media for artistic expression, whereas vessels made of clay were the pots and pans of antiquity. They are present on virtually all historic sites either as whole pots or more commonly as fragments. Some sherds were recycled into tools for rubbing, scraping and polishing, and others were made into useful objects such as lids, loom weights and spindle whorls. Aesthetically speaking, the pottery of South Arabia, composed of a fixed repertoire of shapes and a limited number and kinds of decoration, is less eye-catching than finely painted Greek vases. However, from a technological point of view the potter of South Arabia was quite adept at making complex geometric forms using less than adequate materials with methods that are quite sophisticated. The entire pottery production of the region was restricted to handmade forms, unlike many of their neighbouring cultures where thrown and moulded wares are common. That situation would change only with the rise of Islam, yet the indigenous handmade tradition continues even today.⁶⁶

Pottery first appears in the Bronze Age of Yemen, dated to the third millennium BC, some three to four thousand years later than elsewhere in the ancient Near East. From its inception the forms and decorations were simple: rounded or globular pots that show some stylistic connections to southern Palestine.⁶⁷

When major settled communities sprung up near the end of the second millennium BC, the pottery repertoire quickly changes and complex geometric forms arise. Writing is introduced into the region at this time. The earliest datable examples in South Arabia appear painted on one pottery form in particular, a tall jar with a reserved band near the rim, in a script form which becomes familiar in later texts inscribed on stone; this process is first documented in the Ḥaḍramawt (cat. 200).⁶⁸ Contemporary pottery wares which are technologically and stylistically identical are also known from Saba' and Qatabān.

Although some regional styles developed in Yemen's ancient pottery, there is a strong homogeneity in forms and to some extent in surface treatments and decorations over much wider areas. For example, the classic form encountered in Saba', Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt early on is a shallow bowl, set upon a thin pedestal base, with sharply angled sides. It appears with a red clay coating or slip, which was rubbed after application but before the pot was fired to produce a highly lustrous burnished surface. This form remains a 'type fossil' for nearly half a millennium until the sixth or fifth century BC, when a derivative straight-sided bowl form supplants it (cat. 183). The trend thereafter is for the newcomer and associated forms to lose their burnish, then their slip.⁶⁹ By the fourth century BC and on into the first several centuries AD, when the political and economic situation in the region is in a state of change, most of the pottery is plain or has some painted, incised or applied designs.

Imported wares from the Roman, Parthian and Sasanian Empires appear with some frequency, but unlike the other arts and crafts, their influence is apparently not felt in the local pottery industry, as they enter as packaging rather than imports in their own right (cats 116–17). The sole influence seems to be in the form of the appearance of plaster bungs, some of which are impressed with inscriptions like their Roman period counterparts, but now in old South Arabian script.⁷⁰ Wares destined for export are more problematic, and recent work suggests that one form in particular, an 'amphora' widespread from central Arabia to Ethiopia and common in the Yemen, was a regional product to store or possibly transport a precious liquid.⁷¹ It is still unknown if it once held wine or another liquid. Apart from this form, ceramic exports are not yet known from the region.

The overwhelming conservative trends in ancient Yemen's pottery production suggest that the craft was controlled largely by the relative cost of production and availability of raw materials, and in comparison with modern times, the craftspeople were possibly regarded as belonging to a lower segment of society.

Dress and jewellery

No traces of clothing survive from ancient southern Arabia and textual sources are uninformative on the subject. However, the sculptures offer a useful source of information on styles of dress and the overall visual appearance of men and women alike, whereas a small quantity of excavated jewellery helps to illustrate in detail patterns of personal adornment.

124 Calcite-alabaster stela representing a male figure with a sword

The Jubah

1st century BC–1st century AD

H 44.5 cm, W 27 cm, TH 6 cm

The National Museum, Şana'a, YM 69

In the centre of this beautifully carved stela is a recessed rectangular panel, containing in low relief the figure of a walking man shown in profile facing left, with short curly hair and wearing a plain short-sleeved tunic open at the front; around his waist is a twisted cord belt through which is thrust a knife with a plain hilt and a single-edged blade. The figure holds in his left hand a long, narrow, straight and probably double-edged sword with a crescentic pommel while raising his right hand (Costa 1978, 24, pl. VIIa, no. 12). This gesture is one of supplication to a deity and is also shown on bronze statues from Mārib (see cats 24–5) and calcite-alabaster funerary sculptures of male and female figures from the cemetery at Tamna' (e.g. Cleveland 1965, 24–7, pls 49, 51).

The sword itself is interesting as it attests a type of weapon also found in south-east Arabia which is believed to have been used for thrusting rather than slashing (see Potts



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125

1998, 191–4). It also provides a possible illustration of a custom referred to in a Sabaeen inscription, whereby a number of individuals 'had taken oath ... on their daggers' before embarking on a raid (Beeston 1976, 12, 56). Above the row of ibex heads is inscribed the name of the dedicant, Ghawth'il, son of 'Asm, and below the figure's feet someone has added another personal name, Ammiyatha, son of 'Asm.

This stela has had a variety of interpretations, for some have suggested that this is a depiction of a young god (Pirenne 1977, vol. I/2, 411–13), although it is more likely that this is a funerary stela representing the dedicant himself.

125 Calcite-alabaster stela

Provenance uncertain

1st century BC–1st century AD

H 142.5 cm, W 58.5 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1971-7-2,1 = 135585

This depicts a draped male figure facing left, with one arm raised and the other holding a sword, framed in a border of bulls' heads and recumbent ibexes. It has geometric mouldings, and an inscription at the top centre (below bulls' heads and above draped figure) which reads: 'Wahab'il', a common personal name in Sabaeen, Minaean and Qatabanian (illustrated by Philby 1981, 116). The style of this closely matches the more complete example illustrated above; a small fragment of a third such stela, consisting of the head of a man with short hair and a fragmentary inscription naming him as 'Sharah, son of [the clan] of [...]', exists in the ex-Wellcome collection in the University of Wales in Swansea (Kitchen 1997, 241–2, no. 1 and refs).



126

126 Calcite-alabaster statue of a seated female figure

Provenance uncertain

1st–2nd centuries AD

H 59.5 cm, w 29.4 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1965-10-11,2 = 134694

Statue of a seated woman with hair braided in a plait down her back, wearing a full-length garment; the hands were originally outstretched in an attitude of offering but were broken off in antiquity. The pupils were originally inlaid (Barnett and Curtis 1973, 129, pl. LXI; Philby 1981, 70; right; Antonini 2001, 60, pls 24–5).

127 Calcite-alabaster statue of a standing female figure

Provenance uncertain

1st–2nd centuries AD

H 74.5 cm, w 33 cm, TH 24 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1965-10-11,1 = 134693

Statue of a woman standing in a calf-length garment, wearing heavy-soled sandals with a single thong running between the big and second toes, braided hair hanging down her back in a plait, carved in a similar fashion to cat. 126 above. The outstretched hands survive intact; the inlaid pupil of one eye survives (Doe 1971, fig. 25; Barnett and Curtis 1973, 129, pl. LXIb; Philby 1981, 70; Wilson ed. 1989, 275, fig. 330; Antonini



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2001, 98, pls 50–51). The remains of leather sandals found with highland burials (see fig. 41) confirm the use of the type of footwear depicted here and on bronze statuary from Mārib (see Phillips 1955, pl. opposite p. 285; Albright 1958b, 271, pl. 205).¹

¹ A broad typology of footwear has been devised by Antonini (2001, 74–5, fig. 3).



128

128 Calcite-alabaster statue of a woman wearing a necklace

Probably Tamna'

H 34.7 cm, W 14 cm at the arm (max.)

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1985-2-23.13 = 141544

The inlaid eyes are missing, the outstretched arms are broken and the body has been stylised to a simple cylindrical form. The sculpture is unusual in its careful depiction of a collar-like necklace with pendants (Antonini 2001, 112, pl. 63). Detailed representations of jewellery are relatively scarce on South Arabian sculptures, although an exceptional fragment excavated in the cemetery at Tamna' represents what appear to be three necklaces, the uppermost consisting of double-strung beads alternating with separators and ending in a decorative clasp, strung above two possibly plain metal torcs

(Cleveland 1965, 22, pl. 41). Two additional funerary stelae, one from al-Jubah and the other in the Ternbach collection, depict female figures wearing necklaces above a saltire with what appears to be a pair of stone settings in the centre, attached to a beaded necklace by a pair of animal-headed terminals (Costa 1978, 27–8, pls IX–X, no. 31; Merhav *et al.* 1981, 168–9, no. 131, col. pl.). In rare instances actual jewellery or sheet metal was directly attached to the statues, either as earrings or as sheet metal attached with rivets (Cleveland 1965, 26–7, pl. 51).

129 Bronze statue of a woman holding a small oval object

(Not illustrated)

Possibly Wādī Shalala

2nd century BC

H 28 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', ME 289

This woman is wearing a long dress and three necklaces, one of which is similar to that depicted on the previous statue of a woman (cat. 128). She is also represented wearing a bracelet on her wrist. The woman is holding an unidentified oval object in one hand which could be an offering to a deity (see cat. 158). Her other hand is outstretched in the posture of a worshipper.



130

130 Limestone statue of 'the lady of ad-Dali'

Shuka' cemetery

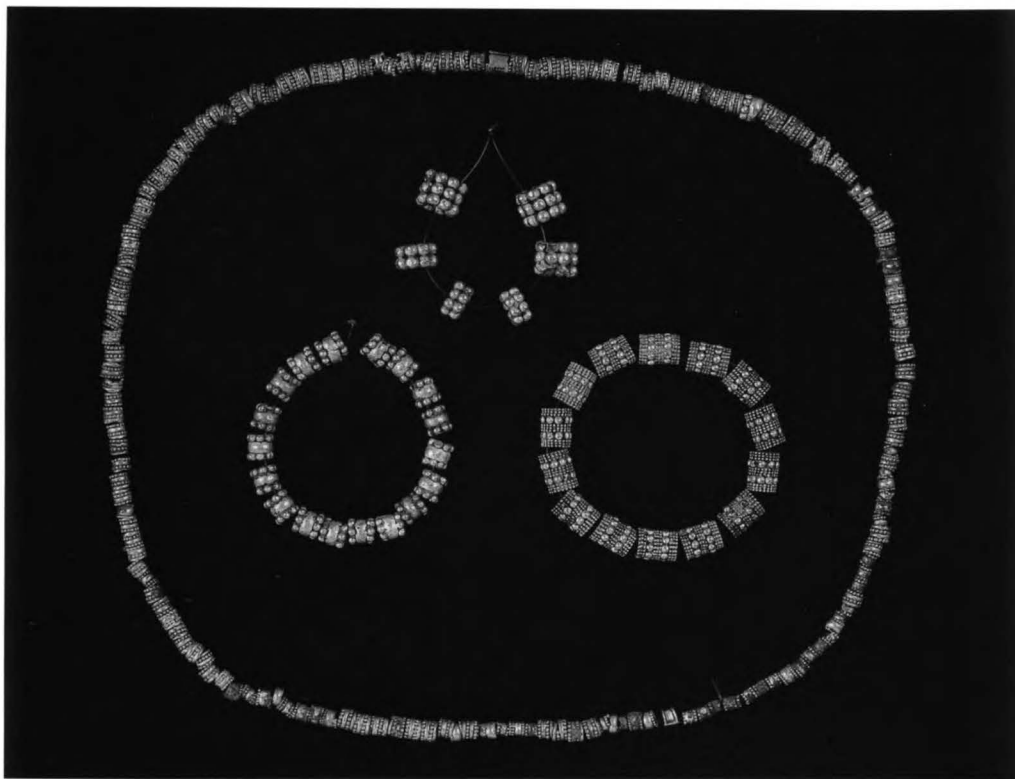
1st century BC

H 54 cm, W 16 cm, TH 14 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 616

This figure was found at the site of Shuka', near ad-Dali. The site comprises a necropolis of simple cist graves and a temple dedicated to Ya'sir. The inscriptions from the necropolis date from the end of the first century BC, the end of the Qatabanian hegemony (Roux

1997, 208). This statue is unusual in its depiction of jewellery, which consists of a diadem with a row of seventeen pendants, and nine beaded necklaces, the third from the bottom suspending a row of small triangular pendants. The statue has been named 'the lady of ad-Dali', but in the absence of an inscription the name of the evidently rather important person represented remains unknown (Pirenne 1986, vol. II, 299–302; Antonini 2001, 108, pl. 60).



131

131 Gold beads

18 beads, D 0.7 cm, w 0.7 cm, 9.8 g;
168 beads, D c. 0.6 cm, w 0.4 cm, 46.4 g;
14 beads, D 0.8 cm, w 1.1 cm, 33.7 g;
6 beads, D 1.2 cm, w 0.7–1 cm, 7.1 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26,19 = 136817;
1977-2-26,20 = 136818; 1977-2-26,21 = 136819;
1977-2-26,23 = 136821

According to the Biblical legend of the arrival of the Queen of Sheba at Solomon's court, gold was an important product of southern Arabia (1 Kings 10). This is also suggested in descriptions by Classical and early Islamic authors (quoted by Hoyland 2001, 110–12). However, until recently there has been relatively little independent evidence to support the existence of gold deposits.

Recent geological surveys in western Arabia from the Medina region to the Maraziq area of the Jawf in northern Yemen

have revealed extensive ancient workings of gold, exposed in quartz veins typically measuring 1–2 m across and occurring near eroded volcanic deposits (Prentiss, Zarins, Hester *et al.* 1984; Heck 1999; Mallory-Greenough *et al.* 2000). These are easily recognisable as they are a brilliant white colour against a darker rock and there is evidence for ancient surface test pits and deep mines up to 150 m in length running along them. Workshops were found nearby in the Maraziq area, with imported hard stone hammers and anvils used to crush the ore and grinders to reduce the fragments into a powder, from which the gold dust could be easily separated using water.

In addition, there is archaeological evidence for an ancient gold-working tradition in southern Arabia. Published here for the first time is a selection of gold jewellery (see cats 131–7). Some of these pieces have

been scientifically examined within the Department of Conservation and Scientific Research at the British Museum.¹ The brittle state of the gold and the degree of silver chloride deposits on the surface prove their antiquity. Black deposits may derive from asphalt which was used as a core to strengthen and support the delicate gold sheet but which, during burial, was redeposited on the exterior surfaces through weathering. Traces of a red surface deposit was identified as a kaolinite clay with an iron content and thus presumably reflects ground burial conditions.

This group consists of a restring collection of gold collar beads, many in the basic form of two plain strips alternating with two rings of small granulated spheres. Some (e.g. 136817) are paralleled by other gold beads published from southern and south-east Arabia suggesting that they were typical of high-class jewellery (Turner 1973, 138, pl.

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LIV, nos 42–3; Morrison 1991, 385, 391, fig. 3: 1; Haerinck *et al.* 2001, pls 100: 84, 129: 84, E: 4). Other hollow spherical beads illustrated here were made in two halves joined at the centre, a technique which relied on the use of a metal punch with a hemispherical tip to stamp tiny gold circles of gold to an identical diameter and depth. The same technique was also used to make fourth-century Greek and Lydian gold jewellery, although there is no evidence for a direct link between these and South Arabian craft traditions, and indeed these South Arabian pieces may be older (Williams and Ogden 1994, 156, no. 95; Özgen and Öztürk *et al.* 1996, 223, no. 203).

1 Unpublished reports (R.L. File No. 3941; Conservation Research Group, report no. CA2002/1). We are grateful to J. Ogden for his comments on this goldwork.

132 Gold beads in the form of lions

Possibly 5th–4th centuries BC

Each H 0.5 cm, L 1 cm, W 0.5 cm; 2.7 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26, 18 = 136816

A restrung selection of eight hollow sheet beads in the form of couchant lions, perforated lengthways; these probably belong to a wider tradition of making beads of this form from stone. Examples made of amethyst, carnelian and lapis were found as part of a fifth- to fourth-century-BC Achaemenid hoard of jewellery and precious metal at Pasargadae in Iran, and a locally carved softstone piece was excavated at Shabwa (Stronach 1978, 169–70, fig. 88: 14, pl. 52c–d; Morrison 1991, 388–9, fig. 2: 58). Granulated gold lion pendant beads were also reportedly part of the Muncheerjee collection in Aden (Harding 1964, 11).

133 Gold appliqués

L 4.4 cm, W 1.2 cm, TH 0.4 cm with loops, strip; 4.4 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26, 10 = 136808

H 2 cm, W 1.9 cm, TH 0.5 cm, square ornament; 3 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26, 13 = 136811

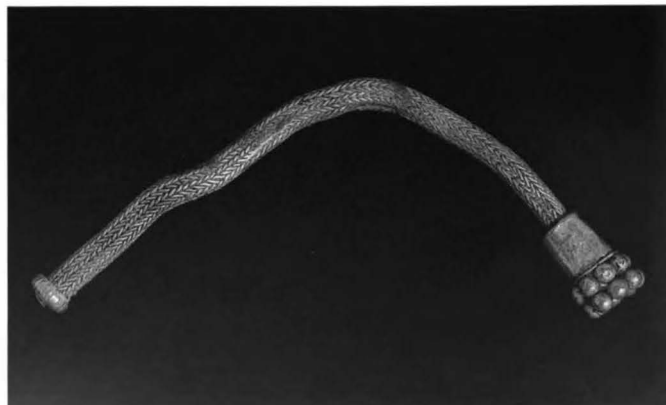
The attachment loops imply that these objects were originally fastened to cloth or leather. This type of appliqué has a lengthy history on the Russian steppe but became



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133



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more popular across the Near East during and after the Achaemenid period. The face of the strip is decorated with very small granules as beading enclosing plain strips and groups of four hollow hemispherical granules, with a row of larger granules above; the flat plain reverse has three equally spaced loops which were intended for attachment. The second hollow square ornament has four attachment loops on the plain reverse; the top is decorated with a row of five pointed granules, with a row of five spherical granules at the bottom and the face decorated with filigree strips and granulation. The care with which these have been made underlines the previously underestimated proficiency of South Arabian goldsmiths.

134 Gold loop-in-loop chain

L c. 13.6 cm, TH of chain 0.5 cm,

TH of larger termination 1.2 cm; 15.7 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26, 26 = 136824

A short length of loop-in-loop chain, one end clamped into a ribbed collar and the other clamped into a plain collar with two rows of hollow globes. This may have formed part of a chain pendant originally attached to a necklace or diadem with multiple chains, of which examples are attested from the Near East and Mediterranean from the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods (Özgen and Öztürk *et al.* 1996, 156–7, no. 109). Loop-in-loop chains were also used in the manufacture of armlets, judging by an example depicted on the statue of one of the kings of Awsān (cat. 36).

135 Gold earring

H 2.5 cm, W 2 cm, TH 1.7 cm, *cloison* W 0.8 cm; 9.3 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26,15 = 136813

This was made with a grooved cotton-reel at the top, with thicker wire at each end attached to a square *cloison* holding braided gold strands ending in a tight cluster of seventeen hollow ovoid acorn-like buds (each made in two halves); the last are attached with shallow, hollow, drum-shaped beads with short swollen bodies and beaded collars at the top and bottom. In contrast, a completely different form of earring, which is reminiscent of the Partho-Sasanian fashion for earrings with large pearl drops, is represented on a funerary sculpture which was excavated in the Tamna' cemetery (Cleveland 1965, 23, pl. 43).



135

136 Gold finger ring

D 1.8 cm, TH 0.4 cm; 1.9 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26,42 = 136840

The small size of this grooved penannular finger ring suggests that it was either made for a child or that it may have been worn between the first and the second joints as is depicted in the statue of Yasuduq'il Far', King of Awsān (see cat. 34). This custom is shown on a number of funerary sculptures from Palmyra and may have been practised by women in Roman Syria (Tanabe ed. 1986, 360, 373, 390, pls 329, 342, 359).



136

137 Gold terminal in the form of a bull's head

H 6 cm, W 4.1 cm, TH 2.7 cm; 12.4 g
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26,2 = 136800

This slightly crushed object was made from thin raised sheet with sets of six applied granules to represent the ears, seven granules for the muzzle and applied tufts along the top of the head; the mouth is hollow. The



137

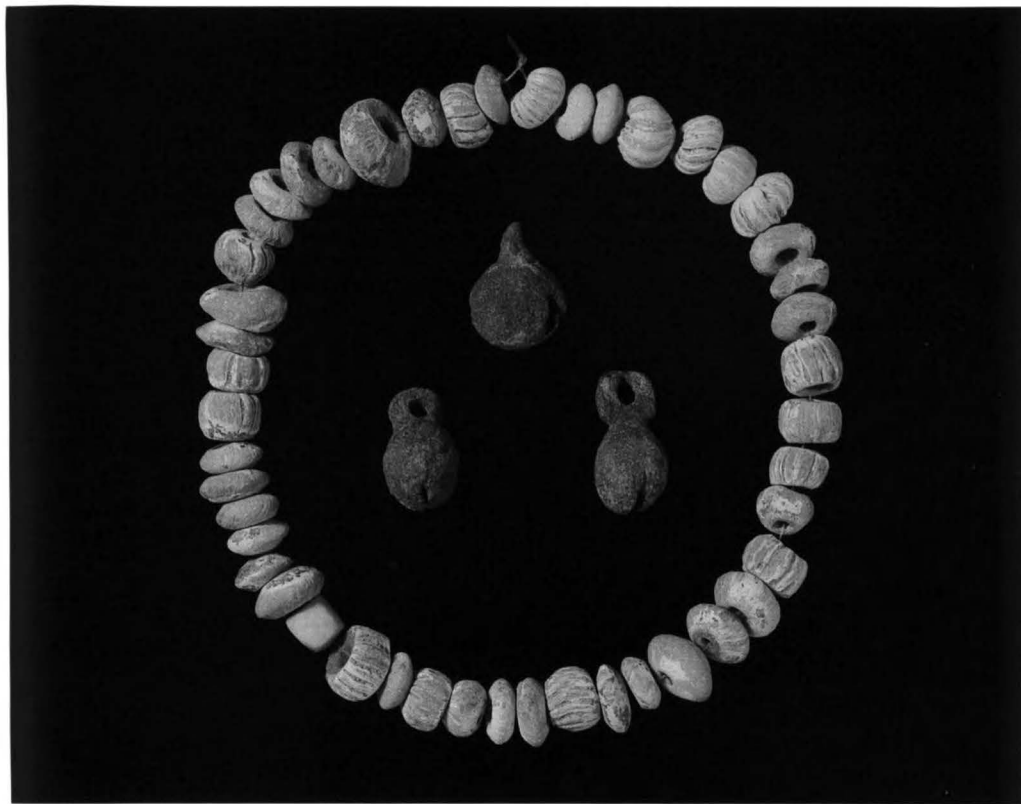
back was originally flat but was torn in antiquity. The eye stones are of circular banded agate with a pale grey lower stratum and dark brown pupil and were set in *cloisons* made separately and sunk into the sheet metal. An ear of folded gold remains behind the right horn. There was a very similar gold bull head in the Muncherjee collection which included a large number of pieces from the Wādi Markha area (Rossini 1927, 750). Similar but larger eye stones were also used as settings in gold roundels in the Muncherjee collection (Doe 1967, 1; Doe 1971, pl. VII; Turner 1973, 133).¹

¹ A description of the collection based on photographic albums was published by Jamme (1955).

138 Glass bead necklace and bronze bells

Acquired in Ṣana'a'
Bells L 2.1 cm, W 1.2 cm
Beads L 28 cm (restrung), W 1.3 cm (single beads)
The British Museum, London,
ANE 1960-12-12,5 = 132913
Presented by Dr Sidney E. Croskery

This restrung necklace of green glass melon and short bicone beads and a single cylindrical disc marble bead, was acquired by the donor in Ṣana'a' in 1942 but possibly dates to the first few centuries AD (see also cat. 245). Dr Croskery worked in Yemen between 1939 and 1967 as part of the British Medical Mission headed by Dr P.W.R. Petrie, OBE. Dr Croskery served as midwife and doctor to the Imam's family as well as in the missionary hospital in Bayhān and the port of Aden.¹ She acquired a small collection of objects in 1942, all donated to the British Museum in 1960. Faience melon beads have been found at Ḥuraydah and Shabwa (Beck 1944, 98, pl. XXXVIII: 5; Morrison 1991, 385, fig. 2: 68) and similar green glass bicones have also been excavated at Ḥuraydah (Beck 1944, 99, pl. XXXVIII: 8). Similar bronze bells were found in domestic contexts in



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level B, dated to the first century BC to first century AD, at Hajar ibn Humayd (C. Van Beek 1969, 320), where they were believed to have been strung on a necklace or – less probably – worn as earrings. A necklace consisting of multiple bells is depicted worn around the neck of a stone bull gargoyle in the Šana'a' National Museum (Costa 1978, 46, pl. XXVI, no. 92).

¹ We are grateful to Miss Leila Ingrams for this information.

139 Bronze armlet or anklet

Provenance uncertain

D (ext.) 11.5 cm, D (int.) 9.5 cm, TH 1 cm; 339.3 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1930-6-13.19 = 122023

Presented by Mrs Gowan

Cast bronze armlet with two pairs of projecting studs; an armlet is shown worn high on the right arm of the seventh/sixth-century-BC bronze from the Awwām temple at Mārib (cat. 25). However, anklets were also worn, judging by contemporary depictions on sculptures and al-Hamdani's reference to the alleged discovery of a tomb containing 'the corpse of a woman wrapped in her shrouds. On her ankles were two anklets of red gold. After he [the commander of the royal mint] had removed them, he buried the corpse. When weighed, the anklets held the scale at 100 *miskals* [4.8 g]' (al-Hamdani 1938, 96).

Furniture and music

140 Bronze armlet

'Amrān

Possibly 1st century BC

D (ext.) 10.5 cm, D (int.) 7.5 cm; 652.1 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1863-1-3,2 = E48283

This bronze armlet with overlapping ends was collected in Yemen by Major C.K. Macdonald and subsequently purchased by the British Museum in January 1863 from John Calvert. The site where it is said to have been found was also the provenance of a large collection of inscribed bronze plaques presented to the Museum in 1862 (see cats 31, 220).



140

The first review of furniture in the ancient Near East was by Speleers (1921) whose thorough study included South Arabia although this region has been omitted in subsequent surveys by Baker (1966) and Herrmann (ed. 1996). Although neither wooden nor metal furniture appear to survive from ancient southern Arabia there are a number of contemporary representations on funerary stelae which offer a useful source of information about the appearance of some types of furniture, namely folding chairs, folding tables, straight-backed thrones and foot stools (e.g. Speleers 1921, 16, 21, pl. II: 17; Rathjens 1953/5, vol. II, pl. 399; see cats 99, 142, 297). Several of these stelae also depict the use of musical instruments. Our knowledge of music and musical instruments in pre-Islamic Yemen is sketchy and thus comes primarily from depictions and from later Arabic sources, as there are no references in ancient inscriptions and no actual examples have survived. However, it seems that music and musicians may have been introduced into Yemen from Mesopotamia during the formation of the South Arabian kingdoms of Saba', Ma'in, Qatabān, Awsān and Ḥaḍramawt, and both lyres and lutes were particularly popular.



141

141 Two calcite-alabaster throne legs

Mārib

5th century BC or later

H 43 cm, w 15 cm, TH 7 cm;

H 37 cm, w 24 cm, TH 7 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 874. 875

These finely carved throne legs depict in unusual detail the hooves and dewclaws (vestigial toes) of ibexes. The upper portion imitates the recessed panelling found on South Arabian building façades and the turned elements on the inner sides represent the stretchers for bracing legs. Simple turned stretchers are first represented in Late Assyrian art but more elaborate examples appear on

Achaemenid furniture, either represented on palace reliefs at Persepolis or extant as bronze elements found in Egypt and Palestine (e.g. Jamzadeh 1996). These continue to be shown on Hellenistic coinage and, in southern Arabia, on second-century BC Minaean coins.

The overall appearance of the furniture of which these legs were part can be reconstructed through comparison with stone blocks found at Mārib and Aksum which were carved to represent panelling – possibly imitative of wooden panelling – supported on animal legs (Van Beek 1959; Pirenne 1965b). It has been suggested that the unfinished appearance of the hooves is due to the fact that these were originally covered with gold sheet (Fakhry 1952, vol. I, 129).

142 Calcite-alabaster funerary stela

Said to be from Tamna' cemetery

1st century AD

H 29 cm, W 27 cm, TH 8 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 2002-1-14.1

Presented by Jonathan Hassell

This stela, although lacking an inscription to indicate the name of the deceased, closely resembles other stelae found at or said to come from Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil, the main

143 Bronze statuette of seated woman playing a lyre

Provenance uncertain

Early 1st millennium AD

H 6.2 cm, W 2.5 cm, D 3.7 (max.) cm; 86.7 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1930-6-13.16 = 122020

Presented by Mrs Gowan

This statuette shows a seated woman playing a round-based lyre with parallel strings. The lyre was a very important musical instrument in Arabia, particularly in Yemen. It has open

depicting women seated on straight-backed chairs and foot stools playing the lyre in the collection at the National Museum of Ṣana'a'.

The South Arabian term for the word 'lyre' is not known, but it was probably the same Semitic word *knr* which was used for the lyre throughout the ancient Near East. The Greek word *Kithara* is a loan-word from the Semitic *knr*. The instrument is still popular among the inhabitants of the Red Sea littoral and is called *simsimiyya* or *tanbūra*.

Lutes were also popular in southern Arabia, hence al-Hamdani's claim that a looted tomb was found to contain 'two huge statues, each representing a songstress. ... In the lap of one of them was a lute, and in her left hand she held a flute' (al-Hamdani 1938, 87). Lutes (Arabic *al-'ūd*) are stringed instruments with a pear-shaped body, a neck with a fretted finger board and a head with tuning pegs. A Sabaeen funerary stela in the Musée du Louvre depicts a musical scene in two registers, the uppermost of which shows a standing woman carrying a lute in her left hand;



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cemetery of Tamna'. It depicts an amply proportioned lady wearing a long dress, playing a lyre and sitting on a straight-backed chair with her feet resting on a matching footstool. She is flanked by two girls or women, one holding a drum. The latter probably belongs to a type constructed by tightly stretching a piece of skin over a wooden frame, a method which is now copied in ceramic in parts of the Near East today. Formerly known as the Aylward stela, this object resembles a second stela in the British Museum collection which has a very similar upper register with the addition of a Sabaeen inscription that reads 'Image of Ghalilā, daughter of Mafaddat and may 'Ahtar destroy he who breaks it' (CIS IV, 419).

strings which stretch across the resonator at the base to the yoke; this is held by two arms at the top. The earliest examples of these instruments are those with sound-boxes in the form of bulls which were excavated at Ur and date to c. 2500 BC; they were also often depicted in Mesopotamian art, including the famous 'Standard of Ur' (Rimmer 1969, 13–14). Round-based lyres were introduced into Mesopotamia from Iran early in the second millennium BC and were the characteristic stringed instruments of the early Mediterranean civilisations (Rimmer 1969, 43). In addition to this bronze statuette, and a depiction of a woman sitting on a high straight-backed chair playing a lyre (cat. 142), there are two Sabaeen calcite-alabaster stelae



143

the resonator is pear-shaped and has two circular holes in the centre to amplify the sound. The setting appears to be a funerary banquet for a deceased man, "Iglum son of Sa'adillāt" who is depicted in the lower register on the back of a camel (Calvet and Robin eds 1997, 108, no. 18). A second stela, found at Haram in the Jawf and dating to the first or second century AD, shows a woman holding a lute and sitting on a straight-backed chair flanked by servants (Ṣana'a', Military Museum). This lute resembles a skin-bellied type known as a *mizhar* which continued to be used into the Umayyad period. The musical instruments were employed during feasts, funerary banquets and religious ceremonies.

MM

Metalwork

144 Persian-period bronze lion

Acquired at Shibām

5th–4th centuries BC

H 55.6 cm, W 26.5 cm, TH 30 cm; 12.5 kg

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, E.10.1979

This sculpture of a roaring lion was presumably one of a pair originally flanking a monumental entrance. It was anonymously presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum in 1979 in memory of Lieutenant-Colonel Mildmay Thomas Boscawen (1892–1956);¹ Boscawen was himself given this magnificent object by his friend Sultan Ali bin Saleh al-Qu'aiti during one of three trips to the Ḥaḍramawt between 1929 and 1933. Unlike his contemporaries Freya Stark, St John Philby and D. Van der Meulen, Boscawen did not record – let alone publish – his travels in Yemen, the extent of which were partially reconstructed by the Political Officer, Harold Ingrams, through listening to local stories (Shipman 1999; see also Ingrams 1942, 138).

The treatment of the face, specifically the ruff-like mane and the wrinkles below the eyes, are characteristic of Persian-period depictions of lions and thus place the sculpture firmly within the Achaemenid period rather than the eighth to seventh centuries as previously assumed on the basis of comparisons with Neo-Hittite art from northern Syria. It also contrasts with other South Arabian depictions of lions on architectural elements and weights (e.g. Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 102, 109). However, this is not the only diagnostic example of Achaemenid art to be found in southern Arabia. A diagnostic seal mount and a gold earring of a well-known Achaemenid type have been published as part of the Munchee collection (Turner 1973, 128–9, 131, pls XLVIII: C, XLIX: M). In addition, a limestone block in the National Museum of Yemen depicts a female figure in a long gown holding a lotus flower in her right hand and, in her left, a portable metal incense burner with a stepped conical lid (Costa 1978, 28, pl. X, no. 32): the latter is closely matched by surviving examples in silver from western Anatolia and depictions on palace reliefs at Persepolis (Özgen and Öztürk *et al.* 1996, 114–17; Invernizzi 1997, 241–4), whereas the motif of a woman holding a lotus flower is familiar from Achaemenid art, not least in miniature



on gold plaques in the Oxus Treasure (Dalton 1964). This depiction adds another category to the range of incense burners attested from southern Arabia and, for the first time, adds rare testimony to the more costly versions invariably produced in metal rather than stone or pottery (see cats 104, 314, 316). However, southern Arabia was never part of the Achaemenid Empire and, indeed, there is scant evidence for Achaemenid involvement in the Red Sea or

southern Arabia (Salles 1996, 253–7). Nevertheless, the fact that Darius (521–486 BC) celebrated the opening of a canal linking the Red Sea with the Nile implies that the economic potential of Red Sea trade was realised at this period and the close parallels noted here between Achaemenid art and objects found in, or depictions from, South

Arabia suggests that there was more cultural transmission via commercial contact than previously recognised (see also cat. 132).

1 We are grateful to Dr Lucilla Burn for kindly providing additional information.

145 Bronze lion's head fragment

(Not illustrated)

Provenance uncertain

5th century BC

H 6.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 1826

This lion's head is also influenced by ancient Near Eastern artistic traditions (see cat. 144), although the detailed treatment differs.

146 Bronze lion's head attachment

(Not illustrated)

Provenance uncertain

2nd century BC

H 22.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 1677



147

147 Bronze decorative fitting

Provenance uncertain

1st–3rd century AD

H 13 cm, TH 9 cm, attachment H 1 cm, attachment (base) L 12.5 cm; 907.9 g

The British Museum, London, ANE 1972-7-22,1 = E48311

A cast bronze fitting possibly originally attached to a piece of furniture and decorated with a snarling lynx; the back of the lynx is decorated with a vine scroll.

148–50 Bronze statue fragments of two kings of Ḥimyar

An-Nakhlāt al-Ḥamrā'

2nd–4th centuries AD

H head 30 cm, L arm 60 cm, L leg 86 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 197, 210, 217

In 1931 fragments of two bronze statues, consisting of heads, thighs, arms and legs, were discovered during excavations guided by the Crown Prince Sayf al-Islam Aḥmad at an-Nakhlāt al-Ḥamrā', the important Ḥimyarite town of Yaqlā'. These are fragments of over-life-size bronze statues of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr and his son Tha'rān, kings of Saba' and dhū-Raydān. In addition, two inscriptions were found on the knees of the statue of Tha'rān. On the slightly flexed

assembled to allow life-size reconstructions of the statues, and copies were presented to the National Museum in Ṣana'a'.

These bronze statues have aroused much academic interest, particularly because of the two inscriptions on their chests. Across the chest of the statue of Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr, King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, runs a two-line inscription which reads:

Dhamar'alī Yuhabirr and his son Tha'rān, kings of Saba' and of dhū-Raydān, have erected that which they have granted to their subjects Bahil Akhtar, Sharahsumyad and Magd, [all] from the tribe Dharānih, for the reception hall in their palace Sana'.

The fragmentary text on the chest of Tha'rān reads the same. The two Ḥimyarite kings thus honoured three of their subjects



148–50

left knee is a Greek inscription stating that 'Phokas made [it]', whereas on the right knee a second inscription in South Arabian script reads: 'Lahay'amm has assembled [it]'. 'Phokas' thus may have been the foreign artist who formed the sculpture, whereas 'Lahay'amm' may have been the local metal-smith. The fragments underwent a lengthy conservation process in the Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum at Mainz. Casts made from the original parts were

by presenting them with these statues of themselves in order to decorate an audience or reception hall. These subjects belonged to the great family of the Dharānih, *qayls* of Qasham, faction of the Dhamārī, a tribe responsible for control of the border between Ḥimyar and Saba' (Müller 1979; Seipel ed. 1998, 385–7, nos 456–7), although the exact meaning of the term *qayls* is disputed (see Robin 1982, 79 ff.; Korotayev 1994).



151

151 Bronze head of a man

Ghaymān

Possibly 2nd century AD

H 20.8 cm, w 17.5 cm, D 18.5 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1937-6-16, 1 = 127409 = L26

Lent by Her Majesty the Queen

A bronze head of a male figure with long hair in curls, the eyebrows being indicated by small incised strokes (Rathjens 1953/5,

vol. I, 49-92, pls 19-39, vol. II, 102-3, 245, pls 387-90). This exceptional piece was presented by Imam Yahya (d. 1948) to King George VI (1895-1952) on the occasion of his coronation on 11 December 1936, an event which was celebrated with fires of incense on the beach at Mukalla east of Aden (Stark 1940, 74). The town where it was found has not been properly investigated, but a number of other bronze objects have

been reported from here following unscientific excavations carried out before the Second World War (see also cat. 166). These were probably instigated because the tenth-century writer al-Hamdani stated that this 'wonderful castle ... also is the necropolis of the famous kings of Ḥimyar [and] should a tomb be discovered and unearthed, precious stones and money would be found therein' (al-Hamdani 1938, 49). Other bronze statu-

ary discovered here includes a large rearing horse – originally with a rider – in the Dumbarton Oaks collection which appears to have been found in 1929. This carries an inscription referring to the dedication of two (bronze) horses and riders by one Hawfi'athat of the Ghaymān tribe to the sanctuary of Madrah; part of a second bronze horse was found in 1931 along with a second, fragmentary, bronze head of the same style as this example (Ryckmans 1975; Costa 1978, 40, pl. XXI, no. 75). Whether the heads belong to the missing riders is speculative but the fact that two heads exist suggests that they are not portraits. The faces are very idealised, which would indicate that they represent gods rather than people. If the pieces did form a group of two horses and riders, it is possible that this was a depiction of the young Dioscuri, the divine twins Castor and Pollux, who are often depicted riding horses. The same identification has been previously independently proposed for the lion riders from 'Tamna' (cats 152–3) and the astral symbolism of the Dioscuri would certainly have appealed to dedicants in southern Arabia (Lyttelton 1991). It is difficult to date the statues exactly, but corkscrew locks were used on Ptolemaic Graeco-Egyptian statuary from the second century BC and longer curls were in vogue with Roman women in the first century BC.

Examination within the Department of Scientific Research indicates that this head was made of a leaded bronze and thus broadly resembles the composition of the Dumbarton Oaks horse and other analysed late-period bronzes from southern Arabia (Ryckmans 1975; Salmon 1969; see cats 167, 221). However, this is not particularly remarkable as leaded bronzes were widely used in the Near East and Roman Empire during this period. The Romans tended to use a specific alloy for their life-size statuary bronze which contained over 15 per cent of lead and about 5 per cent of tin but many examples of statuary bronze containing from 4 to 12 per cent of lead are also attested. The reason for the addition of lead to the alloy was to make the molten metal more fluid, thereby aiding the casting process.

The body metal on this particular object is quite extensively corroded, necessitating the removal of a drilled sample from the chin of the statue. One part of the sample was qualitatively analysed by emission spec-

trography to ascertain the actual elements present in the alloy; the remainder of the sample was used to determine the composition of the alloy using atomic absorption spectrography with polarographic analysis to determine the presence of nickel. The results were as follows and are expressed as percentages with an accuracy of ± 1 per cent and ± 20 per cent for the trace elements (for details of the analytical procedure see Hughes, Cowell and Craddock 1976).¹

Copper	83.5
Tin	7.0
Lead	9.6
Silver	0.05
Iron	0.15
Zinc	0.02
Antimony	0.14
Nickel	0.09

The head now has dark, corroded hair and a golden metallic face. This is not an original contrast but is the result of selective conservation, presumably shortly after its discovery and before it entered the British Museum. The bronze would almost certainly originally have been a deep golden bronze colour all over the head but must have emerged from the ground in a heavily corroded state. The restoration has thereby given it an appearance which it was never intended to have (Craddock and Giumlia Mair 1993).

¹ Unpublished report (R.L. File No. 3280)

152–3 Bronze lion riders

Tamna', south wall of the house of Yafash' near the south-west gate

75 BC–AD 50

H 61 cm, L 52.5 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, TS 152A-B

This famous pair of figures was discovered during the first season of excavations by the American Foundation for the Study of Man at Tamna' in 1951. They were apparently both found lying face-down, almost a metre apart, with the raised lion's forepaws broken away yet the riders intact. They were sealed by a thick ash layer thought to derive from the city's destruction in the first century AD. The combination of teats and mane render these imaginary rather than realistic lions; the boyish riders share similar flat stomachs, rounded faces, full cheeks and curly hair, although their mouths differ in detail. The lions and riders were cast separately and the lions' tongues are thought to have been originally overlaid with silver. The bases are inscribed thus:

Thuwayb and 'Akrah dhū-Muhasni' placed [these figures] at Yafash'. Thuwayb and 'Aqrah of the Muhasni' family decorated the house called Yafash'.

This inscription therefore refers to two men who are identified in a second inscription as father and son of the Muhasni' family in the Suway'um clan. The iconography of the lion riders is classical and may reflect the god Dionysos. The same motif recurs in miniature on a Late Antique tripod-footed brazier acquired in Ṣana'a' which depicts cupids riding lions, a Herakles figure and maenads (Costa 1989).



152-3



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154 Bronze horse and rider

Mārib

1st–3rd centuries AD

H 7 cm, L 6 cm

The Military Museum, Ṣanaʿa, MiM 163

The date of the introduction of the horse to South Arabia is unclear, yet it is believed to be no earlier than the second half of the first century AD (Ryckmans 1963; see Robin 1996b). South Arabian inscriptions contain three terms for horses, namely *ḥrs*, *ḥrṣt* and *ḡḥṣt*, which are interpreted as 'horse', 'foal' and 'group of horses' respectively. The first of these terms is also the oldest but is similar to the word *ḥrs* in Classical Ethiopian which suggests that the horse was introduced into southern Arabia and thence to Ethiopia by Arab nomads. South Arabian inscriptions also refer to the use of 'horses of the army of the King of Saba' and the capture of steeds in battle, although the numbers of cavalry involved were very small.

155 Bronze horse's head

(Not illustrated)

Provenance uncertain

2nd century BC

H 6 cm

The National Museum, Ṣanaʿa, YM 2480

156 Fragment of a miniature bronze fluted pillar with Corinthian capital

Tamna', Building TT1 756
in the north-west of the esplanade

First half of 1st century AD

H 39.2 cm, w 10.8 cm at the capital

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TT1 790

This miniature fluted column or colonnette has a Corinthian capital with acanthus leaf and curly frond decoration, a style which was originally developed by the Greeks at the end of the fifth century BC, but became particularly popular during the Roman period. The two parts of this object were cast using the lost-wax technique. The two pieces were joined at the upper end of the shaft; the base is missing. Indentations on the surface of the capital (which measures 4.4 cm deep and has a diameter of 3.2 cm) indicate that this column was probably one of three or more legs which originally supported a stand or a table. The execution of the capital, the formal details and the fluted shaft of the column are typical of the Near East, whereas in southern Arabia, capitals with regular rather than floral decoration were used. The object is therefore considered to be an import.

157 Bronze statue of a woman

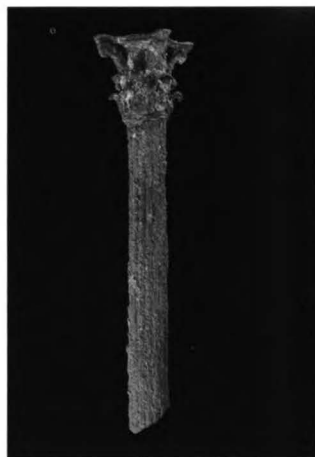
Probably from Tamna'

4th–1st centuries BC

H 23.5 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
Tamna' 1954–2

This statuette is often regarded as an import from the Levant (e.g. Seipel ed. 1998, 384). The head is probably based on Greek models, whereas the style of the drapery and posture are more likely to be Near Eastern. This figure is in a posture comparable to the statue from the Ṣanaʿa National Museum (cat. 129); note the similarity of dress style with the Lady Bar'at statue also found at Tamna' (cat. 158). It may be that these statues represent women offering incense. Around her breast there are traces of a thinly incised inscription in two lines. The first line ends with 'WRM' on her right breast, and the



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second, below, with 'M'. This is one of two statues, probably from Tamna', which were presented to Wendell Phillips (1955, 277) by Sherif Hussein from Bayḥān al-Qasab in 1954.

158 Bronze statue of Lady Bar'at

(Not illustrated)

Tamna', house of Hadath, Room 13

Possibly 2nd century BC

H 52 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 56

This statue was found face down on its inscribed stone base in the cellar of the house of Hadath which was opposite the house of Yafash' where the two lion riders were found (see cats 152–3) by the American Foundation for the Study of Man during the 1951–2 excavations at Tamna'. An inscribed bronze plaque was found in the same room (see cat. 219). A sherd of Roman terra sigillata pottery inscribed with the name Leontes, which was found in the same layer as this statue, helps date the destruction, as this type of pottery was current during the reign of the Roman Emperor Augustus (31 BC–AD 14). Nevertheless, the statue was already old and is considered to be a beautiful example of late Hellenising sculpture from South Arabia



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(Phillips 1955, 172–6). The figure has a Greek hairstyle and is wearing a long tunic but it is clinging and folded, unlike locally inspired South Arabian statuary (Segall 1955, 214, pl. 61). The arms were already broken off when the statue was discovered but their position seems to have been similar to the other statues, where a small round object is

held between the thumb and forefinger (see cat. 129). The statue base carries the following six-line inscription:

Bar'at from the house of Rathad'il son of Shahaz has dedicated this bronze statue to the goddess dhāt-Ḥimyam 'Athtar Yaghul, as she has promised her for her welfare and that of her mental and physical

powers and her possessions, [when she] used to be treasures of 'Amm dhū-Rahbahū and priestess of 'Amm dhū-Daymat. By Waraw'il Ghaylān Yuhan'im.

According to Pirenne (1960, 341 ff; 1962, 257, pl. XVI a–c), this statue is a depiction of the goddess dhāt-Ḥimyam. However, it is more likely that this is a portrait of the 'Amm priestess dedicant Lady Bar'at herself, especially since no anthropomorphic images of South Arabian deities have been identified.

159 Bronze statue arm

Shabwa, palace

1st–2nd centuries AD

l. 34.5 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 218

This arm is a rare example of the bronze statuary which originally decorated the palace of Shabwa. The arm was of Graeco-Roman manufacture and shows the artistic styles typical of the beginning of the Christian era.



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The bronze treasures from the Jabal al-Lawdh

In 1996 the Yemeni authorities were informed of the accidental discovery of a hoard, consisting mainly of bronze objects, at Jabal al-Lawdh. The governor of the Ibb region, together with representatives of the antiquities authority, succeeded in preventing further plundering of the site and secured the majority of the objects. The hoard now comprises 110 objects and represents a unique discovery, as far as the variety and quality of the objects is concerned. Although the exact location of the finds is known, no certain conclusions can be made about the precise archaeological context. The isolated building complex of Jabal al-Lawdh is situated on a small plateau at an altitude of around 2,800 m. Numerous architectural remains are visible, including a number of small rooms, several supporting walls, an enclosure wall and a cemetery; medieval sources mention the existence of a pre-Islamic summit on the peak of the Jabal al-Lawdh. Inscriptions and objects found here date between the third century BC and third century AD.

Stylistically, three different groups of finds can be distinguished. The first is formed by South Arabian – that is, Qatabanian and Himyarite – pieces and consists mainly of bronze vessels of varying shape and function, sometimes bearing long inscriptions, plus sculptures mainly of bulls and bulls' heads (cat. 160). The second group contains a large number of imports from the Graeco-Hellenistic world consisting mainly of statuettes of women and goddesses. The most frequently represented of these is Athena, once even depicted on a stone relief. However, other pieces include a mask helmet in the form of a portrait of a male ruler, a sphinx and an Isis figure with horn of plenty for which a Ptolemaic origin has been suggested (cats 161–5). The third category of finds consists of locally made objects which imitate Graeco-Roman imports. This imitation of foreign Greek deities proves that these imported objects were not only appreciated for their aesthetic and material value, but they could also be imbued with local South Arabian religious beliefs and thus retain their sacred meaning. The majority of the finds at the Jabal al-Lawdh, as well as the many accompanying inscriptions – almost always votive – suggest that this was a temple treasure which had been accumulated over several centuries. Admittedly, these assumptions can only be verified through future excavations.

160 Bronze bull's head with ibex and tree of life motif

Jabal al-Lawdh

3rd century BC

H 19.5 cm, w 19.5 cm, TH 11.2 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 10

Bulls and bulls' heads are among the most frequent depictions in the Jabal al-Lawdh hoard. Above the undeciphered inscription appear the characteristic South Arabian symbols of the crescent moon and star or sun disc. The crest-like motif between the bull's horns of a pair of backward-facing rearing ibexes flanking a palm tree or so-called 'tree of life' is also used on a small group of bronzes and stone sculptures found in Yemen (Doe 1971, fig. 12; Seipel ed. 1998, 369, no. 415; see Gerlach 2000, 278–9). This recalls an earlier and wider Near Eastern tradition also seen on Iron Age 'Luristan bronzes' from western Iran, although there is no evidence for a direct link between these examples as originally suggested (Smith 1952).

161 Bronze helmet in the shape of a mask with the features of a Hellenistic ruler

(Not illustrated)

Jabal al-Lawdh

3rd century BC

H 17.5 cm, w 14 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 27

This almost complete fragment is chased three-dimensionally in sheet bronze in the form of a life-size face. Its identification as a mask-like helmet is supported by the fact that the eyes were not inlaid with a different material, but form narrow hollow slits; there is also a characteristic hollow above the forehead which indicates the original position of a hinge by which the rear of the helmet was fixed and could be opened. The man's head displays the features of a young Hellenistic ruler. On the left-hand side of the neck, traces of a headband are visible beneath which was combed-back hair.

There is archaeological evidence for mask helmets during the Hellenistic-Roman period throughout the entire Mediterranean region including Syria. The discovery of



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such an outstanding piece beyond this extended area, in the wilderness of the Yemeni highlands, and at the periphery of the Empire of Qatabān, is more surprising (Seipel ed. 1998, 390).

162 Bronze bust of Athena

Jabal al-Lawdh

3rd–2nd centuries BC

H 23 cm, W 14 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 3

The goddess Athena is represented three times in the Jabal al-Lawdh hoard. She appears as a statuette, on a small stone relief

and here, as a mount. A short South Arabian inscription of fourteen letters was added to the neck, on palaeographic grounds probably dating to the first or second century AD, and reads: 'We witness this document to Shams' (reading: Y. 'Abdullah). This proves that this object had been offered as a dedication to the goddess Shams, but it is uncertain whether Shams was equated with the Greek goddess Athena, or whether she was simply a deity worshipped on the Jabal al-Lawdh. However, the frequency of Athena depictions in the hoard suggests that the iconographic meaning of this type was understood in southern Arabia.

163 Bronze statuette of Isis-Fortuna

(Not illustrated)

Jabal al-Lawdh

3rd century AD

H 17.9 cm, W 4.5 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 28

This small statuette shows the goddess with a crown and horn of plenty. The garment is tied at breast height with an 'Isis knot'. The right hand once clasped an object, now missing.

164 Bronze statuette of a woman

Jabal al-Lawdh

Possibly 3rd century BC

H 29 cm, W 11.2 cm, TH 7.5 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 1

This type of female statuette with high-girdled garment, presumably based on fourth-century BC models, is represented in this find by two identical examples on which only the position of the separately attached arms varies.



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Vessels and containers



165

165 Bronze sphinx with South Arabian inscription

Jabal al-Lawdh

Possibly 3rd–2nd centuries BC

H 15.6 cm, W 10.6 cm, TH 4.4 cm

The Ibb Museum, IM 4

Over the entire body of the recumbent sphinx runs an unpublished multi-line old South Arabian inscription added after casting and palaeographically attributed to the third century AD (Seipel ed. 1998, 390). However, although the plumed atef-like crown is Egyptianising Graeco-Roman, the sphinx is probably not an Egyptian import but perhaps a product of the Levant.¹

¹ Our thanks to Richard Parkinson (Department of Ancient Egypt and Sudan, the British Museum) and Henrietta McCall (Department of the Ancient Near East, the British Museum) for their comments on this piece.

Small quantities of Roman ceramic plates (*terra sigillata*) and glass bowls (cat. 317), Nabataean painted bowls, Parthian green glazed wares, early Sasanian black-on-red painted beakers (cat. 117) and Partho-Sasanian glassware (cats 118, 170–74) were imported into southern Arabia and used there as exotic tablewares. In contrast, whereas the locally manufactured pottery lacked decorative glazes and tended to be handmade, rather coarse and very utilitarian, greater effort was paid to making more expensive types of container from metal or attractive veined calcite-alabaster. Bone or ivory containers (pyxides), lathe-turned wooden boxes and softstone vessels were also used.¹ The precise function of many of these containers is ambiguous and some simply represent the ancient equivalent of packaging, whereby the contents rather than the vessel in question were the principal source of interest. Future residue analyses will doubtless throw some light on this issue but the surviving evidence nevertheless demonstrates the types of vessels in use and, indirectly, the trade and distribution mechanisms behind their appearance at ancient sites in southern Arabia.

¹ A fragmentary bone or ivory pyxis decorated in low relief with a grazing quadruped set among vine scrolls and reportedly from the Jawf region is in the Archaeology Department Museum in the University of Šana'a' (Display, 2001).



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166 Bronze measuring bucket

Ghaymān

Late 4th–early 5th centuries AD

H 22 cm, D 30 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'ā', YM 282

This cast-bronze vessel was used as an official measure and thus was inscribed with Ḥimyarite royal monograms on one side and a two-word inscription, possibly a personal name, 'Awd dhū-Hskn, on the other. It had two handles, one horizontal, the other vertical in order to facilitate its filling and emptying (Costa 1978, 29, pl. XII, no. 34). The vessel was presumably found in a royal building at the same site as fragments of very fine bronze sculptures (cat. 151). A second measure was excavated at Tamna' in a building destroyed in the mid-first century AD (Seipel ed. 1998, 299–301, no. 176). The overall shape and the presence of the raised bands around the rim suggest that these are high-status versions of a type of measure which was originally and presumably more commonly made of wood and held together with metal bands at the top and bottom. Unfortunately, the everyday role of humble wooden containers, or vessels made of other perishable materials such as leather or woven basketry, tends to be overlooked as these materials rarely survive and, being craft products rather than luxury goods, are not described in historical inscriptions.¹

¹ An exceptional find from al-Bayda' in the Jawf consists of a circular lathe-turned wooden box lid, some 15 cm across, with a knob handle on the top (National Museum, Ṣana'ā', display 2001; YM 2160).

167 Bronze lamp with leaping ibex protome

Provenance uncertain

Probably 5th–4th centuries BC

H 30 cm, w 10.3 cm, l 18.8 cm; 709.7 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1984-3-31.1 = 139621

The ibex was a popular decorative motif in South Arabian art and material culture and there is no reason to doubt that this fine lamp was made locally. The ibex on this particular example has a hole through the right foreleg which may have been used to suspend an object. This lamp is closely paralleled



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by a second example from Shabwa in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna which has a similar protome emerging from a handle in the form of a 'Herakles knot' (Seipel ed. 1998, 304–5, no. 189); a similar lamp also exists in the Musée du Louvre (Calvet and Robin eds 1997, 243–4, no. 167) and a more elaborate example was found at Matara in Ethiopia (Serjeant 1976, pl. 1). The date of these lamps is uncertain but as the protomes are derived from an Achaemenid type and 'Herakles knots' were a popular motif in Greek jewellery, particularly during the second half of the fourth century BC (see Williams and Ogden 1994, 44), it is likely that they date to the fifth to fourth centuries BC.

Examination within the Department of Scientific Research has revealed more details on how this object was made.¹ The lamp was cast in two parts, namely the protome and the base, which were joined with rivets, of which three are still extant; two of these are of almost pure copper alloy whereas the third appears to be of iron and probably represents a later repair (see also cat. 213). X-ray fluorescence analysis indicates that the object was made of a leaded bronze containing traces of arsenic and silver (see also cat. 151).

¹ Unpublished report (R.L. File No. 5059).



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168 Bronze lamp with leaping ibex handle

The Ḥaḍramawt

2nd–3rd centuries AD

H 20 cm, L 18.7 cm, W 8.7 cm; 856 g

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1907-10-12.2 = 102477

The form of this lamp is strongly influenced by a Roman type, with a wick originally floating in scented oil. The lamp was probably intended for everyday use and several similar examples are known from Yemen, including one in the Musée du Louvre (Calvet and Robin eds 1997, 244, no. 168).

169 Bronze handle attachment with ram's head

The Ḥaḍramawt

1st century BC–2nd century AD

L 15.3 cm, W 7.4 cm (rivet attachment),

W 2.8 cm (handle); 309.7 g

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1907-10-12.3 = 102478

This previously unpublished object was probably part of the handle of a patera or portable lidded incense burner, for which there are close parallels from graves in the Wādī Ḍura' (see cat. 314), ed-Dūr in south-east Arabia (Haerincx *et al.* 2001, pls 94: 26, 117, C: 1) and the Roman world.



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170–74 Glass bowl, bottles and juglet

The Jawf

2nd–3rd centuries AD

H 6.5–7.7 cm, D 3.2–10 cm

The Military Museum, Ṣana'a', MiM 101–5

Blown from semi-transparent coloured glass with a light brown, grey or green tinge, these vessels were decorated while the glass was still hot and soft, by dipping into a patterned



170-74

mould, pinching the sides with iron pincers to create 'warts' or adding a handle and trails of hot glass around the neck. They are unlikely to have been made in Alexandria as previously claimed (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 209), but instead belong to a Syro-Mesopotamian tradition; similar vessels have been found in Roman Syria (Clairmont 1963, 50-53, pl. VI, nos 211-21) and late Parthian/early Sasanian sites in Mesopotamia (Negro Ponzi 1972, figs 21-2, nos 40-41, 62), as well as in Yemen itself. They may have been imported into southern Arabia via the Gulf and thus may have formed part of

the same cargoes as Parthian green-glazed pottery found at Khawr Rūrī in Oman, Baynūn and Bi'r Fadhī in Yemen (National Museum, Ṣana'a, display 2001) and as far as Ras Hafūn in Somaliland (Doe 1964, 7, 10-11; Doe 1971, pls 34-5; Smith and Wright 1988). The function of the bottles is uncertain although narrower-mouthed contemporary counterparts may have been used to contain perfume; the bowl was presumably used for drinking.¹

¹ Other glass vessels of these types are currently (2001) displayed in the National Museum in Ṣana'a: YM 1955-59, 1961, 1964.

175 Inscribed calcite-alabaster 'beehive' jar

Provenance uncertain

3rd century BC-1st century AD

H c. 9.7 cm, D 10 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1934-5-10.1 = 125338

Presented by Dr L.A. Lawrence

This type of calcite-alabaster jar or so-called 'beehive'-shaped vessel has been found throughout the Arabian peninsula but the majority in Yemen, particularly in burial contexts. This vessel has a flat bottom, two pierced bull's head handles and two short drilled, dotted Qatabanian inscriptions which read: 'Myr', and 'Bkhl', in other words two personal names, 'Ammyyatha and 'Abkahil'. The lid has a handle on the top in the form of a stylised animal's head (Philby 1981, 33; Hassell 1997). The vessel is said to have been found containing a mixed hoard of coins, mostly of South Arabian origin, including fifteen silver Sabaeen bucranium series coins dating to the second-third centuries BC, six Himyarite Royal series coins



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dating to AD 50-150, a Roman republican silver denarius, and a Roman provincial bronze of Antoninus Pius (AD 138-61) (Walker 1933, 273-5). A second 'beehive' jar with an engraved inscription of a Qatabanian personal name, again associated with a hoard of silver and bronze South Arabian coins, was published by Oddy (1998). If indeed these coins were found in these vessels, it implies that the latter had been recycled in antiquity, as vessels of this type are believed to have been intended as containers for unguents in the form of semi-solid perfumed ointments or animal-fat grease.



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176 Calcite-alabaster pyxis with lid

Hajar ibn Humayd, Stratum A, Building 3, Corridor B

Mid-1st century BC–2nd century AD

H 10.4 cm, D (base) 10.2 cm, D (rim) 9.5 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, TC HI 11

This particularly fine example is complete with a lid, and its outer polished surface is decorated with incised lines around the base and rim. In the centre of the lid handle, which is in the form of two ball-shaped projections, one on top of the other, there is a drill hole partly filled with plaster where some sort of ornament may have been attached (Van Beek 1969, 276, pl. 120b).

177 Softstone vessel

Possibly from the Mārib area

Possibly 3rd–1st centuries BC

H 10.5 cm, D (outer rim) 8.9 cm

The British Museum, ANE 1977-2-26,1 = 136799

This stone vessel with perforated lug handles is made from a local variety of softstone (*barad*) popularly known as steatite or chlorite which is easily carved and continues to be made into kitchenware bowls and incense burners in Yemen (Muchawsky-Schnapper 1994, 30–31, 40–41; this volume, Chapter 8). Similar-shaped vessels made of calcite-alabaster are also found in southern and eastern Arabia. A two-letter inscription and another undeciphered symbol is incised inside the rim. The two letter inscription reads 'Bn' (F. Bron. pers. comm.),



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and is a popular personal name in Safaitic, which is also attested in South Arabian on a bronze seal (Rathjens 1953/5, vol. II, 161). This particular vessel is said to have been found containing a hoard of gold jewellery, a selection of which is catalogued above (cats 131–7).

178 Inscribed calcite-alabaster tray

Provenance uncertain

H 9.1 cm, L 28.5 cm, W 16.2 cm

The British Museum, London, ANE 1972-2-26,1 = 135682

This extraordinary thin-walled footed tray is decorated on all sides with a row of highly stylised bulls' heads. One side is inscribed with the incomplete personal name 'Na'datum dhāt-H[...]'], presumably the individual who dedicated this object.

179 Miniature calcite-alabaster vessel

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

Possibly 5th–4th centuries BC

H 2.5 cm, D 2.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 732

These miniature alabaster vessels were very common in both funerary and temple contexts at Mārib and are thought to have been manufactured especially for use in temples and cemeteries.



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Pottery from Hajar ibn Ḥumayd

Hajar ibn Ḥumayd is a stratified tell site on the Wādī Bayḥān approximately 11.5 km south of Tamna', the capital of Qatabān. The site was located on the ancient caravan route that linked the incense-producing regions on the South Arabian coast with the Egyptian, Palestinian and Mesopotamian consumers in the north, and the settlement may have functioned as a customs depot for the kingdom of Qatabān (Van Beek 1969, 4). The American Foundation for the Study of Man excavated at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd in 1950–51, under the direction of Wendell Phillips. In 1969 Gus Van Beek published the excavation report and a large part of the volume is devoted to a description of the first stratified ceramic typology for South Arabia. The entire archaeological sequence at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd comprised twenty levels (Strata A–S) and was thought to span a time period from the late second millennium BC to the fourth or fifth century AD (Van Beek 1969, 40–58, 364–5). Radiocarbon dating was used at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd to date a number of charred wooden beams which were found at various levels during the excavation. The earliest sample gave an uncalibrated date of 852 ± 160 BC and the level to which the wooden beam belonged, Stratum Q, was thus given a date of the ninth or eighth century BC (Van Beek 1969, fig. 133). The radiocarbon dates have been recalibrated and there is a strong possibility that the Level Q sample dates to before the beginning of the eighth century BC (Glanzman 1994, 90).

This radiocarbon date is very significant because two South Arabian inscriptions on pottery were discovered in the deepest layer of the site (Stratum S). As the inscriptions were found more than a metre below the charred beam in Stratum Q, a date earlier than the eighth century BC for the first evidence of writing at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd was considered highly probable. Early evidence for writing from the stratigraphically controlled excavation at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd was very important during a time when scholarly opinion about the date for the beginning of South Arabian civilisation varied by at least three centuries. The results from Hajar ibn Ḥumayd clearly conflicted with Jacqueline Pirenne's influential early premise that Classical Greek script directly influenced the development of monumental South Arabian and that the appearance of South Arabian inscriptions could be dated to the beginning of the fifth century BC (Pirenne 1956, 149–151). The results from Hajar ibn Ḥumayd helped to establish that the beginning of South Arabian civilisation could be dated to the late second millennium or the beginning of the first millennium BC, and Van Beek's pottery typology continues to provide archaeologists with a valuable resource with which to compare ceramics from other pre-Islamic sites in Yemen.

180 Pot with applied decoration

Hajar ibn Ḥumayd, Stratum N,
Pottery Type 1002, Bowl 3

Late 8th–late 6th centuries BC

H 11.3–11.7 cm, D (base) 10.3–10.5 cm,
D (rim) 18–18.5 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
H 2128

This handmade bowl has applied decoration on the rim in the form of an ibex head and two smaller animals on either side. Two vertical lines incised into the wall of the bowl indicate the front legs of the ibex. There is a red disc painted between the horns of the ibex, which may symbolise the sun or star which is usually seen in conjunction with the crescent moon. The head of the ibex and the sides of the vessel are cross-hatched in red paint, and other areas are decorated with Xs (Van Beek 1969, 127, pl. 35c, fig. 46).



180

181–4 Ceramic bowl, jug, pedestal bowl and cup

Hajar ibn Humayd, Stratum N, Type 1002, Bowl 5; Type 1002, Jug 1; Type 1002, Less Common Form 1; Type 1110, Bowl 7

End of 8th–third quarter of 6th centuries BC

H 7.1–7.4 cm, D (base) 5 cm, D (rim) 9 cm;

H 12 cm, D (base) 5 cm, D (rim) 9 cm;

H 9.2 cm, D (base) 8.2–8.5 cm, D (rim) 12.1 cm;

H 7.1–7.3 cm, D (base) 5 cm, D (rim) 8.8–9 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, H 2070; H 2069; H 2064; H 2066

The three most common forms of pottery decoration at Hajar ibn Humayd were incision, painting and application. Red painted pottery and applied zoomorphic figures were particularly characteristic of the earlier phases at the site. Some fine painted examples include a bowl (H 2070) with a row of red dots, and a jug (H 2069) with the rim and body decorated with four bands of red paint; the vertical loop handle of this jug is incised with a design consisting of two holes on either side of a vertical line, which represents eyes and a nose. This is a common motif in the early phases of the site. The small bowl with a pedestal base (H 2064) is decorated with red painted cross-hatching and triangles, and the cup (H 2066) has burnished red slip on all surfaces, which is also a common feature of pottery in the earliest phases of occupation at Hajar ibn Humayd (Van Beek 1969, 127–9, 134, pls 35d, 36c, 36e, 37d, figs 47, 50, 58). The pigment on these and other South Arabian objects was probably simply obtained by crushing locally obtained

iron oxides, as indeed they still are on traditional Yemeni pottery (Posey 1994, 26). However, in Soqatra so-called 'dragon's blood' tree resin was used to create a dark red colour on the locally produced pottery (Naumkin 1993, 207–8).

185 Ceramic carinated bowl

Hajar Surbān

First half of 1st millennium BC

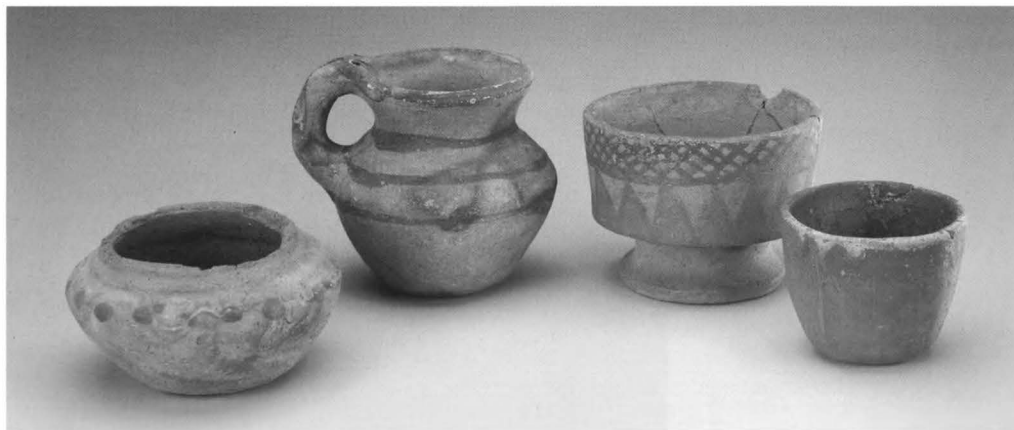
H 8.2 cm, D 20.5 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 634 (SUR-2-12)

Since 1989 the French Mission for South Arabian Archaeology, under the direction of Dr Jean-François Breton, has conducted archaeological surveys in the Wādī Bayhān and the Wādī Markha in order to study the different phases of occupation and origins of irrigation agriculture in the region (Breton *et al.* 1998). One of the early archaeological sites included in the survey was Surbān al-'Ala or Surbān 2, located on the eastern bank of the Wādī Surbān in the Governate of Shabwa approximately 45 km south-east of Nuqub. This ancient village consisted of ten to fifteen small rectangular stone houses, which have recently been unearthed and reused by nomads. During the unearthing of the houses at Surbān 2, the nomads uncovered a large number of ceramic vessels, many of which were intact, including three complete vessels (cats 185–7), a carinated bowl, a jar with an everted rim and an inscribed ovoid pot with three vertical handles. Many

of these vessels had parallels with the pottery types from Hajar ibn Humayd (Van Beek 1969; Breton 1999, 159). Breton suggested that the vessels from Surbān 2 dated to the eighth to sixth centuries BC (Breton 1999, 159). The carinated bowl and jar with everted rim were pottery types that were widely used in South Arabia during the first half of the first millennium BC.

Three virtually complete carinated bowls with pedestal bases, slightly angular sides and one or more incised lines along the outer rim were found at Surbān 2 (Breton 1998a, 218, SUR-2-1, 2, 12). The vessels were handmade and had a dark red or brown slip on the exterior and interior and a red fabric with fine organic temper. This form occurs at numerous archaeological sites across South Arabia including Hajar ibn Humayd (Van Beek 1969, 137, 157, figs 61, 94), Hajar ar-Rayhāni (Glanzman 1987a, 72; Glanzman 1994, 137, 143, 147), Hajar at-Tamra (Blakely 1985, 106–7, figs 36: 8, 37: 18; Glanzman 1987a, 72–3), Mārib (Albright 1958b, fig. 194: 9), Wādī Yalā (de Maigret ed. 1988, 14, figs 18: 1–7, 19: 2), Raybūn, Sūna (Sedov 1996, 85, fig. 7: 5, 7), Hajar Yahirr, and a great many others in the Wādī Markha-Jibāh region (Breton 1998a, 161; Arramond 1998, 198) to name but a few (see Glanzman 1994, 145–6). Ceramic vessels with similar forms have also been found on the Red Sea coast at the sites of Madinat Kashoba (formerly known as the Gas Station Site) and al-Midaman (Ciuk and Keall 1996, 20, pl. 95: 1).





185-7

186 Ceramic jar with everted rim

Hajar Surbān

First half of 1st millennium BC

H 33.5 cm, D (rim) 13 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 638, (SUR-2-15)

Three jars with everted rims were found at Hajar Surbān (Breton 1998b, 220, SUR-2-16, BM 639, SUR-2-17, BM 640; Seipel ed. 1998, 296, no. 166). This jar type was first recognised by Gus Van Beek at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd, who denoted them 'Type 4100 Jar I' (Van Beek 1969, 170–71). This type has also been called the 'Torpedo Shaped Jar' and simply 'amphora'. Regardless of name, this handmade section-built jar had an unmistakable set of morphological characteristics, which included an everted rim, a very narrow neck, a biconical body and a flared pedestal base. The form is also characterised by its distinct 'sand-temper'. Van Beek noted that this vessel type had an exceptionally wide distribution and had been found at virtually every known pre-Islamic site in southern Arabia, as well as at a number of pre-Aksumite sites in northern Ethiopia and central Eritrea (Van

Beek 1969, 92–3, 369). Van Beek suggested that some of the examples from Hajar ibn Ḥumayd were imports from Ethiopia and that they indicated commercial relations between South Arabia and East Africa during the first half of the first millennium BC (Van Beek 1969, 369). This vessel form does indeed have a wide distribution, ranging from sites such as the Maḥram Bilqis (Albright 1958b, fig. 192: 102), the Bar'ān temple, Samsara and Ṣirwāḥ, Wādī Yalā (de Maigret ed. 1988, fig. 23: 10, 12–15) in the Mārib region; Hajar ibn Ḥumayd (Van Beek 1969, fig. 133), Hajar Yahirr, Hajar am-Husayna (Breton 1998b, 225, pl. 19: HSY-1) in the Wādī Bayhān-Markha region; al-Barīra (Doe 1971, fig. 32), Raybūn, Adiat al-Sultan (Harding 1964, pl. XVII, 29, XVIII.29), Ḥurayḍah, also in the Ḥaḍramawt and al-Hāmid, Wāqir, al-Midaman, Madinat Kashoba on the Tihāma, and Yeha and Matara in Ethiopia. However, rather than demonstrating trade links, petrographic analysis has shown that these amphorae were usually locally produced (Porter 2002).

187 Inscribed ovoid pot

Hajar Surbān

First half of 1st millennium BC

H 15.5 cm, D 8.5 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 637 (SUR-2-14)

This complete handmade ovoid jar was also discovered at Surbān 2. It has three vertical lug handles, traces of burnish on the body and an 18-cm inscription (SUR-2-14). The inscription was incised before firing and reads, 'Ikbr' or 'Il is great' in pre-geometric (or archaic) letters which vary in height between 3 and 4 cm. François Bron's epigraphic report on the vessel suggests that the *r* in the inscription had parallels between Strata O and Q at Hajar ibn Ḥumayd which date to the ninth to eighth centuries BC and that the ' had parallels in Stratum H which dates to the fifth century BC (Van Beek 1969, fig. 133; Breton and Darles 1994, 50; additional note by Bron 1994, 56; Breton 1998a, 159; Breton 1998b, 203).

Architecture

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BRETON

All these cities are ruled by monarchs and are prosperous, being beautifully adorned with both temples and royal palaces. (Strabo 16.4.3)

The tradition of constructing monumental architecture developed in ancient South Arabia as a direct result of wealth created by the long-distance incense trade which stimulated massive building projects such as the construction of city walls, palaces and temples.¹

AN INDIGENOUS ARCHITECTURE

From the eighth century BC, a new architectural tradition with construction in stone appears in the Sabaeen heartland of Mārib, as well as in the Jawf valley about 100 km to the north-west. The distinctive character of this architecture has often led to questions as to how far these buildings can be considered to be of local inspiration or how far they instead reflect foreign influence. The number of countries trading in the area may explain the range of possible influences exerted over South Arabia. Egypt was first suggested as a source of influence because of the use of hard limestone monoliths, each weighing 2 to 4 tons, carefully polished and engraved, plus the use of the Egyptian cubit (52.5 cm) and the popularity of an irregular chiselled oblique form of dressing.² The use of recesses casting light and shadows on the façades and smaller embedded panels imitating wooden window frames may also have been borrowed from the Egyptians, although the latter is a feature also found in Urartian and Achaemenid architecture.³ Possible Iranian influence may also be seen in the use of stone basements supporting high mudbrick superstructures, as in the case of Achaemenid palaces at Persepolis and Susa,⁴ whereas during the seventh century BC city walls were constructed of mudbrick with an outer wall of stone, which may have been a feature copied from Assyria.⁵ However, none of these hypotheses seem particularly convincing.

Apart from these building techniques, architectural formulae appear to have been few in number. The wealthy houses shared the same plan, with a high stone

basement measuring some 10 × 12 m supporting a wooden frame. The simplest form of temple had an open-air courtyard with rooms at one end, whereas in later periods more elaborate temples were constructed, with a high central building and a lower courtyard surrounded by porticoes. The same formula seems to have been applied to sanctuaries such as the Bar'an Temple in Mārib, and palaces like the so-called TT1 at Tamna' and the palace at Shabwa.⁶ Monumental propylea with five to seven pillars and upper panels decorated with projections (dentils) are generally associated with these religious buildings and appear to belong to a local architectural tradition. It may thus be assumed that the first temples, at least in the Jawf, are largely the work of local builders operating independently of styles abroad.⁷

All these features are common in South Arabian cities during the first millennium BC. Buildings are massive, flat-roofed and rectangular in plan. Their outlook seems rather severe, particularly in the Sabaeen areas with only dentils, red painted inscriptions, alabaster panels and some bronze plaques. Statues of gods were uncommon, if not prohibited, and stone sculpture in the round appears to be rather clumsy.

BUILDING TECHNIQUES

Another original feature lies in the building techniques of the Jawf from the eighth century BC, where there is extensive evidence for the use of regularly coursed ashlar masonry, walls constructed with a single horizontal row of stretchers, blocks with tapered backs, careful dressing of the faces and particular attention paid to the bonded quoins in the angles. The best evidence for marginally drafted and pecked masonry can be seen in the tombs south of the Awwām temple at Mārib, the south-east tower at as-Sawdā' and the fortifications at Kamna.⁸

One of the characteristics of South Arabian building is the effective combination of wood, limestone and



FIG. 46 View of the 'Royal Palace' at Shabwa.

(Photo: B. Vogt)

mudbrick, although the use of these materials is not unique to southern Arabia. Mudbrick was required to construct terraced foundations for stone buildings. In the case of urban fortifications, a mudbrick core was erected at the same time as an outer stone wall, the two being linked by stone stretchers. Wood was used not only as a lacing reinforcement against earthquakes but also to provide a structural framework for the walls. Stone, particularly limestone, remained a vital component for centuries, implying the existence of a large and skilled workforce qualified to rough out, load, quarry and undertake the final dressing of the stonework. The masons involved have left hundreds of marks on the blocks and it is suspected that these craftsmen were of a high social status.⁹ Some of them, specifically the *garbay* (*grby*), who were well known in the city of Raybūn in the central Ḥaḍramawt, may be traced back over four generations.¹⁰

The most striking example of building techniques is the framework. Long beams, cross-pieces, wall plates and posts were combined to construct a framework 1.5 m high and 0.45 m wide. Two frames make a 2.5-m top floor. The frame was then infilled with mudbricks and earth. The outer face was covered with a limestone slab, sometimes decorated with a geometric pattern, as in the case of the palace at Shabwa, or engraved with *ex votos*, as in the temples at Raybūn.¹¹

HOUSES AND PALACES

Most buildings were houses. Those constructed within hamlets and villages scattered through an oasis were built using local materials but according to different traditions. In the Ḥaḍramawt and the Jawf mudbricks

were used to construct the walls and benches, palm trees were used for the ceilings and mud plaster for the surfaces, which were occasionally painted red. Examples of such houses have also been excavated in the towns of Ḥurayḍah¹² and Shabwa, but most houses in the Bayḥān and Mārib areas were built of drystone. Hundreds of small houses have been recorded measuring up to 100 sq. m, but some 'villas' in the Wādī Surbān, east of Bayḥān, range from 250 to 400 sq. m, suggesting the presence here of wealthy landowners.¹³

Generally, the housing within the main cities was very different in appearance and anyone wandering across the ruins of these cities is struck by the use of high stone basements with regular internal partition walls. These basements presently survive to a height of about 3–5 m and are completely eroded, but they originally supported wooden floors. The first examples of this form of domestic architecture to be discovered were at Shabwa. In 1938 Major R.A.B. Hamilton spent some six weeks excavating at this site. Following a lecture Hamilton subsequently delivered at the Royal Geographic Society on the results of his work, Sir Leonard Woolley suggested that the ancient houses were like the modern mud-built 'skyscrapers' in the Ḥaḍramawt, the height of which is up to 20 m at Shibām, a suggestion confirmed by the more recent French excavations in 1978.¹⁴ Many ancient South Arabian building inscriptions indicate the number of floors within houses as three or four, with up to six in Zafār.¹⁵ These inscriptions also provide the name of the owners, for instance 'Rafa'an son of Shafay and Way'il, son of Ghawtham . . . built his house Yafad'¹⁶ or 'Hawfi'amm son of Thawnab . . . erected his house Yafash' (in Tamna').¹⁷ In addition, Muhabyah, Atkan son of Manakhum, is said to have 'repaired his palace Ahdathan, from the foundations to the top, six levels with six floors . . .', thus each tower-house vouches for the prestige of these noble families.¹⁸ These dwellings were fortified with small openings or loopholes and they all appear to have participated in the city defences, even when it was walled, additionally offering on occasion protection to a specific point of the city, such as the palace positioned near the main northern gate of Shabwa (fig. 46).¹⁹

Usually, these tower-houses were located in the urban centres, either small towns – the smallest being S'na in the Ḥaḍramawt, which covers an area of only 2.7 ha – or the capitals themselves. The number of such buildings in a town varied from around 60 in Hinū az-Zurayr (ancient Haribāt) or 80 in Najrān, to as many as 250 at Shabwa. It is possible to use these figures to provide an estimate of population size in these towns as there were some 20 to 25 houses to the



FIG. 47 General view of the city site of Shabwa.

(Photo: J.-F. Breton)

hectare. At Shabwa, for instance, the total of 250 tower-houses, with an estimated average of 10–15 inhabitants each, allow an estimated population total of 2,500–4,000 people (fig. 47), although the total population of the ancient city of Mārib was probably twice this number as its sophisticated irrigation system enabled the cultivation of a larger oasis and thus increased carrying capacity.²⁰

The most impressive excavated tower-house is the so-called 'Royal Palace' at Shabwa, which was thoroughly investigated by the French Archaeological Mission between 1976 and 1985.²¹ It was constructed over an earlier building dating approximately to the tenth century BC and later incorporated within the city walls. At the beginning there was a tower-house above a lower U-shaped building with a central courtyard. The area is about 56 m × 40 m. During the first phase of construction a small building surrounded by benches was erected in the centre of the courtyard. After its destruction new rows of seats were built in front of the portico and the courtyard came to resemble a 'theatron'. All of these buildings were destroyed at first by a Sabaeen attack in AD 225, the details of which are reported in a long text from Mārib.²² This records how a small Sabaeen detachment conquered the building, which was called Shaqār, but became trapped inside for thirteen days until they were finally

rescued by the Sabaeen army. After the battle the city of Shabwa was sacked and burned, but some years later the palace was completely rebuilt. The height of the U-shaped building was now increased by one storey, with a gallery illuminated by windows supported by stone mullions. Its ground floor was decorated with classical frescoes. The main tower-house was also reconstructed, albeit slightly differently to the previous arrangement, with wooden posts in the main porch and black stone ibex friezes; the central porch was adorned with two bronze locks and iron nails.

This palace was finally destroyed by fire during the fifth century AD. Among the different destruction layers about 300 pieces of wood were discovered which allow a precise reconstruction of the appearance of the interior of this building. For instance, short boards had been employed to build coffered ceilings with thin alabaster sheets, thus resembling the *velum* (veil) found in the centre of Roman house ceilings in Alexandria. Some of these boards were painted red with dentils or were used as windows and door frames.²³ Until now no other excavation has provided such a range of architectural elements. According to Strabo, South Arabian 'houses, in the mode of binding the timbers together, are like those of Egypt'.²⁴ Although it may seem strange, excavations in the 1940s revealed that Ptolemaic houses in the Nile delta or in the Fayūm oasis used large

FIG. 48 The southern towers of the wall at Barāqish.
(Photo: J.-F. Breton)



timber-framing.²⁵ Some of these dwellings are similar to tower-houses and are sometimes shaped as clay models or depicted in the 'Nilotic landscape' mosaics from Egypt.²⁶ On the western side of the Red Sea in Tigray it was common to use wooden posts and frames before the sixth century BC, as recorded in Grat Be'al Gebri, and some centuries later Aksumite palaces continued to require large quantities of wood for their walls.²⁷

CITY WALLS

As far as is known, ashlar masonry was not used for the construction of city walls in the Ramlat as-Sab'atayn desert region before the first millennium BC. Therefore, in the Yemeni highlands small settlements such as Hammat al-Qa were topping ridges and peaks from the Bronze Age (2200–1400 BC), but these lacked mudbrick or ashlar fortifications.²⁸ In the lowlands there were very few Bronze Age fortifications except possibly the site of Diaw in the Wādī Khawra. During the proto-Sabaic period (1200–800 BC), some settlements such as Hajar ar-Rah near Bayhān consisted of a ring containing a small number of houses connected by walls. As these sites resemble 'enclosed settlements' found in southern Palestine and the Negev, it has been proposed that they may belong to small social groups which originated in north-west

Arabia. However, even if these groups did migrate from there, it seems very unlikely that they would have changed the whole socioeconomic face of southern Arabia.

In the very beginning of the first millennium BC most settlements consisted of a ring of houses joined by a single or double wall. In these cases each house played an important part in the defence of the whole system. This archaic system lasted for a long time and in some areas, such as the Qatabanian kingdom, it survived for a millennium. Cities such as Tamna', Ḥaribat (modern Hinū az-Zurayr) and Hajar adh-Dhaybiyya (in the Wādī Ḍura') were defended by dozens of tower-houses built of wood and thus were rather easy to burn down. In other sites such as Yala or Ḥizmat Abū Thawr in the Wādī Jawf, the former defensive ring was replaced by a city wall. It is clear now that the first kings erected stone fortifications around most of these settlements.²⁹ Therefore the city wall appears to be a hallmark of the Sabaean state from the seventh century BC. Centuries later, small groups of 'Arab' nomadic tribes arriving in Yemen were establishing new enclosed settlements with a circle of small houses built around a central space. Many sites inside the Wādī Markha, such as Hajar Talib or Hajar Lajjiyya, belong to this period of the first century BC to the second century AD.³⁰

The earliest ashlar masonry fortifications date to the seventh century BC, exemplified by those at Kamna, as-Sawda' (in the Jawf) and Mārib. Kamna is unique in that the walls crown a 13-m high tell. Its fortification was constructed with two horizontal rows of stretchers with no inner mudbrick wall. Elsewhere the normal method was to have a single horizontal row of stretchers connected by headers to a mudbrick wall.³¹ This ashlar masonry façade shows major discontinuities due to long stretchers (c. 1.2–1.80 m) and short headers (0.30–0.40 m). These blocks were finely dressed with marginal drafting. Behind the wall, all the fittings, floors, staircases and covered ways were constructed of wood. Most cities have long curtain walls, slightly projecting towers of the same height and simple gateways, but lack strongholds and glacis, except in the case of Tamna' and Hajar adh-Dhaybiyya.³² The surfaces of the walls were inscribed, either with the names of the Sabaean *mukarrib*, as at al-Bayda', or of the tribal chiefs, as at Barāqish or Ma'in, but unfortunately, few texts give the name of the tower or curtain wall. The taxes and the amount of money paid for the work are also seldom recorded and the financial organisation of these massive public works thus remains uncertain. Large inflows of money could explain the quality of construction, whereas cash flow problems or other crises may explain unfinished work, as in the eastern towers at Ma'in.

Finally, the question remains as to why these fortifications were constructed (fig. 48). With their high walls, which measured 8–15 m in height, and their massive towers, it seems unlikely that any could have been successfully assaulted or destroyed by artillery and, indeed, it is most unlikely that South Arabian armies in the first millennium ever possessed such equipment. The only opportunity would have been to besiege the city and hope to cut its water or food supplies in order to force a surrender.³³ Alternatively, the function of these walls may have been political or to enhance prestige, since they acted as urban political landmarks (*hajar*) in the oases. The peasants, nomads and shepherds were thus outside the wall, whereas the tribal, religious and commercial authorities were within; in this respect it is significant that the main 'caravan cities' such as Ma'in, Barāqish, Mārib and Shabwa were encircled by the most prestigious fortifications.

TEMPLES

Temples are the best documented buildings in South Arabia as they have been the focus of the most excavation (figs 49, 50). From 1928, the Huqqa temple north of Ṣana'a' was excavated by C. Rathjens and H. von Wissmann;³⁴ and the temple at al-Huraydah

(central Ḥaḍramawt)³⁵ and the Awwām temple in Mārib were excavated in 1938 and 1951 respectively.³⁶ After this date, when it became possible to undertake scientific excavations in Yemen, the following sites were excavated: the main sanctuary at Shabwa between 1976 and 1978; the Ba'qutfa sanctuaries in eastern Ḥaḍramawt and the 'Athtar temple in as-Sawda' between 1988 and 1989; and the Awwām and Bar'an temples in Mārib.³⁷ These different excavations have provided a great deal of information about building techniques and architectural formulae but sadly little about personal beliefs or rituals.

Generally, temples were small, only measuring 15–25 m in length. They were usually rectangular with a central courtyard, an adyton and cellae; only one temple at as-Sawda' included a funerary chamber. Cities had one or more temples inside the city walls and at least one beyond. Even where the extramural temple was dedicated to the same gods as the urban one, it was mainly destined for use by rural tribespeople and caravaneers. Current research indicates that the earliest temples are situated:

- in the Jabal Balaq near Mārib, where there are small buildings with three cellae, some associated with rooms with benches as at Dish al-Aswad;³⁸
- in the Mārib oasis, where the earliest phase of the Bar'an Temple may go back to the ninth century BC and consists of a massive square building, although only partially excavated;
- in the Jawf, where some sanctuaries were erected outside the cities of as-Sawda', Ma'in, Haram and Kamna. All four temples have a monumental entrance opening onto a courtyard with porticoes. The gateway and porticoes are covered with carefully dressed heavy slabs. In a unique feature fifteen unincised trapezoidal stelae are placed against the walls of the entrance, the gateway and beneath the porticoes. As in Egypt, polished monoliths some 5 m high are entirely covered with rows of engravings showing, from bottom to top, snakes, ibexes, spear-shaped trees, figures, more snakes and ibexes and long-stemmed flowers. Small female figures standing on pedestals wear long dresses; their hair is arranged on either side of their shaven heads, and they carry long bent rods (see cat. 188). Another Minaean temple displays standing figures, some wearing loincloths, carrying sticks, lyres or bows and walking in procession.

Out of these four temples only that at as-Sawda' has been completely excavated and dates back to the eighth century BC. Its four main dedications, including 'Abamar Sadiq has built the Temple of 'Athtar' (texts SW-BA 1 and 2) and 'Abamar Sadiq has consecrated

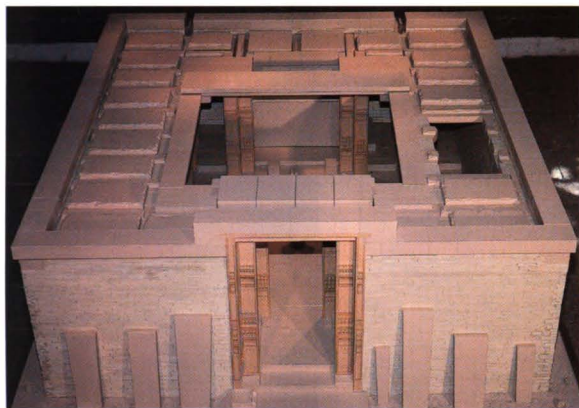


FIG. 49 Model of the 'Athtar temple, as-Sawdā.
(Photo: J.-F. Breton)

FIG. 50 The 'Athtar extramural temple, Ma'in.
(Photo: J.-F. Breton)



the Temple of 'Athtar' (SW-BA 3 and 4), are engraved with pre-geometric letters.³⁹ On the pillars of the courtyard some texts with more classical characters give the names of 'Sumhuyafa' Yasran, son of Lub'an, King of Nashān, and his three sons Yada'ab 'Amar, Ma'dikarib and Dadkarib.⁴⁰ The 'Sumhuyafa' Yasran, son of Lub'an' is known mainly through the Širwāh inscription relating the Sabaean expansion under Karib'il Watār, son of Dhamar'ali, in the seventh century BC.⁴¹ During one of his campaigns he is said to have besieged, attacked and plundered the city of Nashān.

During the subsequent seventh and sixth centuries BC two series of sanctuaries were erected in the Jawf and in the Ḥaḍramawt. In the Jawf the open-air courtyard became a fully covered cella with rows of stone pillars buttressing the roof, with the addition of a monumental porch supported by pillars and a triple flight of steps in front of the main entrance. One of these sanctuaries, excavated by an Italian mission in Barāqish, was dedicated to the god of healing, Nakrah.⁴²

In the Ḥaḍramawt valley and its tributaries, temples were built on high stone footings which supported timber-framed walls. The dhāt-Kafash temple in Raybūn is made up of a central hall with wooden pillars and a flight of stone steps leading to a high podium at the far end. In one corner there was a lime-stone staircase leading up to a flat terrace where cult

practices involving incense burning are thought to have been held. It is worth noting that some of the sanctuaries of Hajar Yahirr, Kuhayla and Tamna' were flat-roofed like some Syro-Palestinian temples, such as that of Bel in Palmyra. The Russian mission has excavated the Hadran temple in Raybūn dedicated to 'Athtar from which come some 500 fragmentary *ex votos* engraved on stone slabs.⁴³ In the nearby Mayfa'an temple many members of different families thanked the god Siyyan for healing their eyes or skin diseases.⁴⁴

All the cities of the Ḥaḍramawt were dominated by

an extramural temple constructed against the rocky slope. Dozens of these monuments are known, including sites at Raybūn, Mīh, 'Uqran, Suna, Mashgha, al-Hajra, Makaynun, 'Atham, Ba'qutfa and Husn al-Qays. One of the largest of these is the Qays sanctuary, which measures some 38 m in length and 36 m across, with a monumental staircase, open-air terraces, annexes and two principal cubellae. In contrast, one of the smallest is Ba'qutfa, which measures only 18 m by 16 m. The excavation of this particular temple yielded eighty-six stone inscriptions, with dedications to the Hadrami god Siyyan using his local epithet 'dhū-Halsum'. If the oldest texts indeed date as early as the seventh century BC as has been suggested, the latest may belong to the first century BC.⁴⁵ It seems likely that some of these holy places survived for a long period thereafter and were reused throughout the medieval period: the prophet Hud sanctuary and the Ahmad ibn 'Isa shrine near Say'un were both probably founded on the site of pagan temples.⁴⁶

There were many temples in Shabwa, the capital of the Ḥaḍramawt of which the main one was dedicated to Siyyan dhū 'Alim, 'Siyyan who provides ritual meals during pilgrimages'. Inscriptions also testify that other temples were dedicated to dhāt-Zahrān, to 'Athtar and possibly an archaic one to 'Almaqah,⁴⁷ although archaeological research is still unable to identify clearly each of these. The principal temple, located at one end of the main street, lies on the slopes of Jabal 'Aqab. Nowadays, a monumental staircase, some platforms laid out as terraces and the huge foundations of a statue remain, but neither the cella nor the cultic installations survive. During its later stage of development, in the beginning of our era, this sanctuary was decorated with statues. In the centre stood a monumental bronze statue which probably represented a king. The central staircase was topped by four statues and four bronze-framed pillars whereas there may have been five life-size bronze statues of horsemen on the lower eastern terrace.⁴⁸ This decorative programme, so far as we can reconstruct it, seems to owe more to Classical inspiration than a purely local style. The development of South Arabian art should be considered in the context of maritime relations between the Roman world and South Arabia, as the *Periplus* states that 'statues were imported for the king'.⁴⁹ Ships may therefore have imported statues via the port of Qāni' to be assembled or set up in Shabwa. However, foreign artists in the service of the kings of Shabwa were also able to cast similar statues, and goldsmiths are described as having produced major gold and silver pieces.⁵⁰

Architectural elements

188 Limestone pillar

The Jawf region

Possibly 8th century BC

H 111 cm, w 28.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 3633

The central decoration consists of a pair of standing female figures with flowing hair, each standing on a plinth, wearing long sleeves and a long skirt decorated with horizontal zigzag patterns, and holding a curved sickle-sword or other implement in their right hands and an unidentified wand-like object in their left hands. The remainder of the lightly incised decorative scheme consists of cross-hatched panels, zigzag patterns, ibex heads and vertical intertwined snakes. This extraordinary decoration has been considered evidence of foreign, even Mesopotamian, artistic influence (e.g. Fakhry 1952, vol. I, 143–6). However, the discovery of identical schemes on three temples known as Banat 'Ad outside Ma'in, Kharibat Hamdan (ancient Haram) and as-Sawda' (ancient Nashān) – all in the Jawf – plus Ma'in itself, al-Bayda', Mārib and al-Jubah, clearly indicate that this is indigenous work and thus these may simply represent a precursor of later South Arabian art (Audouin 1996). As evidence for a well-developed and distinctive architectural decorative tradition as early as the eighth century BC, they help to demonstrate the existence of a thriving local cultural tradition at the beginning of the Iron Age in South Arabia (see cat. 209).

189 Limestone architectural ornament

Al-Bayda'

5th century BC

H 51 cm, w 82 cm

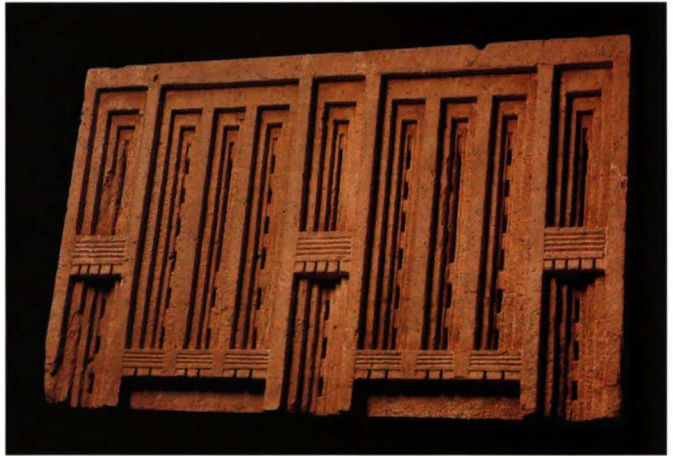
The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 10240

The front of this slab is decorated with repeating rows of tall narrow triple recesses which were a common feature on building façades during this period. A similar effect was achieved on earlier buildings in the kingdom of Urartu in eastern Anatolia as well as contemporary Achaemenid tower-temples at Naqsh-e Rostam and Pasargadae in Iran (Stronach 1967); whether or not



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there is any connection between these traditions, the effect was the same, to create a pleasing alternation of light and deep shadow across otherwise monotonous architectural façades. The same decorative effect was replicated in miniature, for instance on altars and incense burners (see cats 103, 105, 207, 210), as indeed it also was in Urartu (Du Ry 1969, 186).



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190

190 Limestone bull's head spout

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

5th century BC

H 22 cm, W 20 cm, TH 17 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 205

This powerfully expressive bull's head underlines its importance as a symbol for the god 'Almaqah as it was used within a temple dedicated to the same deity (see also cat. 216).

191 Fragment of calcite-alabaster pediment

Mārib

2nd century AD

l. 23.6 cm, w 17.2 cm, TH 10 cm

The British Museum, London, ANE 1996-7-13,1

This fragment may originally have belonged to the same building as a well-known fragment of sculpture formerly in the Aden Museum (details of which are illustrated on Yemeni 20 and 100 rial banknotes). This depicts a nude female bust emerging from a vine spray and wearing a beaded necklace and armlets; this scene is set below a triangular pediment decorated with vine scrolls and a presumed pair of antithetical mythical beasts set in the corners above, the right-hand piece of which would be represented by the British Museum fragment; the position of these beasts corresponds to that often filled by winged victories in eastern Roman architecture (e.g. Tanabe ed. 1986, 17, 113–18, pls 73–9). The original appearance of this mythical beast can be reconstructed on the basis of the larger second fragment as a lion or dog-headed animal with wings (as here) and a long curled fish tail, that is being grasped from behind by a nude youth holding an unsheathed sword in his right hand (Pirenne 1957, 103–8, pl. VIIa; Doe 1971, pl. 9). The iconography of this sculpture may be inspired by Classical mythology, and similar marine creatures are shown on Palmyrene tesserae and a temple basin at Baalbek (Seyrig 1934, 168). The goddess figure has again been interpreted in the light of Syrian Classical architecture as the goddess Atargatis, but it is more likely that she represents a local South Arabian deity.

192 Calcite-alabaster voussoir

Probably Mārib

H 26.5 cm, w 46 cm, TH 15 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1985-2-23,1 = 141532

This central portion of an arch shows an eagle fighting a snake, a monogram, a division line and the paw of a lion; the remainder is unfortunately missing. The presumed mythological significance of this scene is unclear yet the eagle was possibly the symbol of the gods Sayin, Nasr or Wadd and



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is illustrated on a South Arabian seal in the British Museum where an eagle is shown grasping a snake (ANE 1854-4-1,23 = 120304; Walker 1962, 455–8). The same motif recurs on other architectural fragments including several belonging – like this piece – to the architrave (Rossini 1927, 743; Fakhry 1952, vol. I, 128–9; Doe 1967, 7; Costa 1978, 36–7, pl. XVI, no. 67; Christie's 2001, 12, lot 218).

193 Limestone sculpture of a rider with lion skin

Shabwa

H 32 cm, w 24.5 cm, TH 0.6 cm

The Ashmolean Museum, 1952.520

This piece was excavated at Shabwa in 1938 by Major R.A.B. Hamilton (later Lord

Belhaven and Stenton), who was posted to Yemen in December 1931 to take command of a camel troop belonging to the Aden Levies. Hamilton served there until 1940 and later published two autobiographical accounts (Hamilton 1949, 1955) which included references to his archaeological interests, plus a novel about Aelius Gallus' failed Roman expedition to southern Arabia in 26/25 BC (Hamilton 1951).¹ Further details on his excavations were published after a lecture he gave to the Royal Geographical Society (Hamilton 1942) and his finds were presented to the Ashmolean Museum in 1952 (Brown and Beeston 1954; see Lush 1998). Hamilton excavated several rooms, one with a staircase, belonging to a building which he mistook for a funerary complex, owing to the lack of connecting doorways and the occurrence of what he took to be human bones. Later research indicates that these rooms belonged to a domestic structure with subterranean basements, possibly originally supporting a multi-storey structure (see also Harding 1964, 38–9, pl. XLI: 6; Doe 1971, 231–2).

Objects found in this building included a cuboid limestone incense burner and a number of fragmentary, sometimes burnt, gypsum slabs decorated with vine scrolls, ridges and furrows, and figural scenes. This last category encompassed bulls' heads, lions



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and human figures, including this interesting piece that shows a horserider wearing a lion-skin cloak that billows out behind him (Brown and Beeston 1954, 48, 62, pl. XIX: fig. 1 = Hamilton 13). Whether this was intended to be a representation of Herakles, the subject of another sculpture from this site and possibly regarded as syncretistic with the South Arabian deity 'Almaqah (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 214), or whether this was considered to be a sign of rank, as on the earlier statue of Ma'dikarib (see cat. 24), remains uncertain.² A brief South Arabian inscription was later added above the horse's rump, and can be read as 'BHSM'; although the meaning of this is obscure, it remains of interest as a rare instance of an inscription being added in ink rather than being carved directly into the stone. Finally, traces of red, yellow and blue pigment were found on several sculptures, the blue possibly being derived from local indigo although no scientific analysis has yet been undertaken of these pigments.

1 We are grateful to our colleague Christopher Walker for bringing this novel to our attention.

2 Another sculpture from Zafar shows a bearded Herakles in a lion-cloak which Tindal (1980, 112) interpreted as evidence of Parthian influence on South Arabian art.



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194 Decorated limestone capital

Shabwa, palace, Building B

Mid-3rd century AD

H 46 cm, w 49 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 1218

This capital was erected on one of nine pillars probably sculpted as part of palace reconstruction following a fire in AD 230. The motif of a griffin with one raised forepaw in front of an urn derives from Hellenistic art; it recurs on a stone frieze from Bayhān (Doe 1971, pl. 12) and is related to depictions on third-century-AD Roman architecture at Palmyra in Syria (Tanabe ed. 1986, 120, 125, pls 81, 87), Parthian cornices from Hatra and Nineveh and as far east as Lou-Lan in Chinese Turkestan (Safar and Mustafa 1974, 347, 381–2, 388; Curtis 1989, 60; Stein 1912, vol. I, 292, fig. 98).

195 Marble architectural gutter

Shabwa, palace

3rd century AD

H 62.5 cm, w 25.8 cm, TH 6 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 145

This gutter with a bull's head spout was probably set in the roof beams of the porticoed palace building at Shabwa. Although it may have helped to channel water away from the wall in the rainy season it probably served a decorative rather than functional role (Breton 1997b, 113).



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196 Limestone capital with acanthus leaf decoration

Shibām-Kawkaban

2nd–3rd centuries AD

H 36 cm, w 18 cm, TH 18 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'ā, YM 24

This capital had a decorative rather than structural function and although influenced by Classical architecture it differs in the details and proportions, the leaves being arranged directly above each other rather than placed randomly as with the Classical prototypes. Funerary stelae depict acanthus leaf capitals surmounting fluted columns and supporting broad arches (e.g. Seipel ed. 1998, 336, 338, no. 291; see cat. 142).



196

197 Limestone architectural fragment

Qānī

End of the 2nd–4th centuries AD

H 16.4 cm, D 7.5 cm (max.)

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 328

This fragment was found in the ruins of a temple where it had presumably been employed as architectural decoration. The zoomorphic motifs of lions and mythical beasts have been interpreted as evidence for Iranian influence, yet the vine scroll suggests Graeco-Roman models and the linear style of the figures points to local manufacture (Seipel ed. 1998, 381).



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198 Limestone inscription commemorating the construction of a palace by Abyssinian ambassadors

(Not illustrated)

Zafār

AD 510

H 46 cm, w 63 cm, TH 8 cm

The Zafār Museum, ZM 579

This inscription commemorates the construction by Abyssinian ambassadors of a palace with a sculpted and polished stone entrance. The inscription reads:

[...] with gratitude to Raḥmānān, the Lord of the sky, and by [...] of their Lord King Marthaḏ'ilān Yanūf. Shegā' and his sons Wadfā and Asbehā, the envoys, have erected and completed their house Shab'ān from its foundations to its roof, and have erected within it an entrance of polished and hewn stones. By the grace of Raḥmānān. In the month dhū-Ma'ūn of the year six hundred and nineteen.

Based on the names of the individuals mentioned in the text, the authors of this inscription were Abyssinian ambassadors. The inscription is dated to the month dhū-Ma'ūn of the year 619 of the Ḥimyarite era, which corresponds to March AD 510. The monogram in the middle of lines four and five can be broken down into the letters WDFH, corresponding to the Ethiopian name Wadfā (Seipel ed. 1998, 379).

Languages and Writing

FRANÇOIS BRON

'South Arabian Epigraphic' is the conventional term used to designate the language of the inscriptions carved in stone, wood or metal which constitute the only surviving examples of writing of the pre-Islamic civilisation of Yemen. The earliest examples go back to the first half of the first millennium BC whereas the most recent predate the Islamic Conquest by a few decades. The name by which the inhabitants of Yemen referred to their language is unknown, as is the name by which they referred to themselves, other than the name of the



FIG. 51 Sabaeen building inscription in the dam at Mārib. (Photo: St J. Simpson)

tribe to which they belonged. All that is known is that the term 'Arab' to them meant the desert nomads or Bedouin. 'South Arabian' also denotes a series of languages spoken today in a region astride the frontier between Yemen and Oman and on the island of Soqatra. These will not be discussed here and recent research seems to demonstrate that they are not closely related to the languages of antiquity, although they too are Semitic.

CHRONOLOGY

The chronology of South Arabian inscriptions has been a long-standing matter for scholarly debate.¹ It is only during the last few years that a consensus has been reached for dating the earliest inscriptions to around the eighth century BC. Essentially, they are written in four dialects, originally attested in three

wādis in the inland desert of Ramlat as-Sab'atayn, and in the Wādī Ḥaḍramawt. This desert was also called Ṣayhad by medieval Arab geographers, and this has led A.F.L. Beeston to propose the name 'Ṣayhadic' for these dialects.² From north-west to south-east they are Minaean in the Wādī Jawf, Sabaeen in the Mārib region and on the Wādī Dhana, Qatabanian in the Wādī Bayhān and the Wādī Ḥarīb, and Ḥaḍramitic. The origin of these languages remains shrouded in mystery. They are normally classified according to their geographical distribution, as a south Semitic group together with Arabic and the languages of Ethiopia, but they also present strong affinities with west Semitic languages of the Levant, notably Ugaritic and Aramaean. The earliest onomastic, in particular, offers disturbing similarities with Amorite onomastic of the second millennium BC.³

The origins of Yemeni civilisation still remain very obscure, owing to the relative lack of archaeological excavation of early-period sites. This leads us to tentatively argue as a simple working hypothesis that Sabaeen was originally the only written language, arising from the supremacy of the kingdom of Saba' which, at the beginning of the seventh century BC, succeeded in dominating the greater part of Yemen. The other languages would only later have achieved the status of written languages when the respective states of Ma'in, Qatabān and Ḥaḍramawt freed themselves from Sabaeen domination.

It is therefore very difficult to date the earliest Sabaeen inscriptions with any precision on purely paleographic grounds. It is certain that they go back to at least the eighth century BC, as the long historical inscriptions dated to the early seventh century have a monumental character and elaborate phraseology that can only have resulted from a lengthy period of evolution. From these latter texts it is known that the kingdom of Saba' dominated a large part of Yemen at that period. Later, during the second half of the first

millennium BC, the kingdom lost its power and Sabaeans was only used in the Mārib region and on the high plateaux to the north of Ṣana'a'.

Nevertheless, from the beginning of the Christian era, Sabaeans expansion revived. Sabaeans was adopted as the written language of the Ḥimyar tribe who originated to the south of the high plateau and seized power in the kingdom of Saba' towards the end of the third century, before unifying the whole of Yemen under its domination and finally embarking on a political campaign of conquests which engulfed the whole of the south of the Arabian peninsula. This is attested by half a dozen rock inscriptions in Saudi Arabia, extending as far as the Riyadh region.⁴ Furthermore, from the second century BC, with the arrival of new nomad populations, Sabaeans was

discovered in al-'Ula oasis in the north of the Hejaz, where the Minaeans had founded an important colony. They also left written evidence of their presence as far as Egypt and the island of Delos.⁶ Its situation in the northern part of South Arabia meant that the Minaean kingdom was the first of the South Arabian states to be submerged by the advance of desert nomads, and it vanished towards the end of the first millennium BC.

Qatabanian is the dialect of the kingdom of Qatabān which occupied the Wādīs Bayḥān and Ḥarīb. Around the fourth to third centuries BC it became a homogeneous entity and extended into the high plateaux as far as the Zafār region, which adopted its language. However, from the first century BC this influence declined, the tribes of the region recovered their autonomy and adopted Sabaeans. Finally, in the first century AD, the capital Tamna' was destroyed and the kingdom was reduced to the upper reaches of the Wādī Bayḥān before being conquered by the Ḥaḍramawt towards the end of the second century.

As for the Ḥaḍramawt, the earliest texts from the region, which are extremely laconic, display a strong Sabaeans influence which gradually diminished. From the middle of the first millennium BC the Ḥaḍramitic dialect established itself and reveals a striking series of peculiarities that distinguish it from other South Arabian dialects. From then on it is attested not only in the wādī but also in the capital Shabwa, located further west, and at various sites between the Ḥaḍramawt and the Indian Ocean. In the first century AD a colony was founded in Zafār, which lies in present-day Oman, where a series of texts has been found.⁷ This dialect disappears when the Ḥaḍramawt was finally absorbed into the Ḥimyarite kingdom at the beginning of the fourth century AD.

Although knowledge of these languages has greatly increased during the last thirty years, it is still very incomplete. This is essentially due to the documentation that survives. The inscriptions belong to a certain type of text which could be termed 'official' and stereotyped (figs 51–2). They are mostly records of the construction of houses, tombs, religious buildings or irrigation works, dedications in temples and some legal texts, with only a few commemorative inscriptions recording hunting or military expeditions. These are always couched in the third person and it is only recently that the first and second persons of the verb and pronoun became known. It is noteworthy that no mythological or literary texts survive, with the possible exception of a hymn to the sun goddess carved on a rock, which appears to be written in a peculiar and largely incomprehensible dialect.⁸ Common words are fairly well understood, but meanings of specialist



FIG. 52 Inscribed bronze plaque from Shabwa, The British Museum, ANE E48479. (*The Trustees of The British Museum*)

increasingly influenced by Arabic, especially on a lexical level.

The chronology of the other dialects is less certain. The earliest Minaean texts seem to be contemporary with the first Sabaeans inscriptions. Minaean derives its name from the Minaeans – the Greek name of the small kingdom of Ma'in on the Jawf which consisted of three adjacent towns, Ma'in, Barāqish and Nashān, and owed its prosperity to caravan trade. Inscriptions found in the capital indicate the regions where Minaean merchants resided: in the north of the Arabian peninsula, Egypt, Gaza and throughout the western part of the Fertile Crescent. However, recent discoveries indicate that this dialect was used at sites which were independent of Ma'in, and may even have antedated the foundation of the Minaean kingdom; this has led Robin to propose the term Madhabian, from the Wādī Madhab which flows into the Jawf.⁵ Numerous inscriptions, mostly rock-cut, have been

terms relating to law or architecture, for instance, are largely elusive. However, this situation is beginning to change: a new type of document has appeared during the last thirty years of which the first examples have only very recently been published. These texts consist of little wooden sticks inscribed in tiny writing that is very different to the monumental script and has had to be deciphered. This method was used for documents relating to daily life, accounts, contracts and letters, although only a score of these documents has so far been published.⁹

The South Arabian dialects are characterised by a phonetic system consisting of twenty-nine phonemes; that is, one more than Arabic. Like biblical Hebrew and modern South Arabian dialects, they distinguish three sibilants. In other respects, however, the phonetic system seems to be identical to that of Arabic.

South Arabian writing, like other Semitic scripts, originally recorded only the consonants, thus considerably hampering an understanding of the language; vocalisation, vowel length and even the doubling of consonants remain unknown. Only *w* and *y* at the ends of words may sometimes indicate vowels. For this reason, knowledge of the language must rely, to a large extent, on comparison with other related Semitic languages. South Arabian morphology seems to have many affinities with that of Arabic with which it shares many characteristics, such as the abundance of broken plurals of nouns. Because of the system of writing, the different verbal tenses cannot be precisely distinguished. Unlike Arabic, the causative is formed using the prefix *h-* in Sabaeen, and *š-* in Minaean, Qatabanian and Ḥaḍramitic. This same difference in vocalisation appears in the way the third-person pronouns are formed (Sabaeen *hw'*, Qatabanian *šuw*, 'he'). There is another difference with Arabic in that the definite article is appended to a word, *-n* (*-hn* in Ḥaḍramitic). Finally, it has recently been discovered that the first and third person forms of the verb in the accomplished tense have the ending *-k* (*f'lk* compared with *f'a'ltu* in Arabic), as is the case with modern South Arabian languages and Ge'ez. Although the vocabulary is generally closely related to Arabic, it nevertheless has some peculiarities, with a sizeable proportion of words more closely related to north-west Semitic. Finally, another part of the vocabulary can only be understood thanks to its survival in Arabic dialects in present-day Yemen.

THE SOUTH ARABIAN ALPHABET

The inscriptions of ancient Yemen are written in a peculiar alphabet of twenty-nine signs, unlike Phoenician which has twenty-two signs. The languages of the Arabian peninsula, including present-day Arabic,

have a richer use of phonemes than those of the Fertile Crescent. Whereas the different alphabets used throughout the modern world ultimately derive from the Phoenician alphabet, the South Arabian alphabet has survived up to the present in the Ethiopian syllabary. The first South Arabian inscription of any length was discovered by the British sailors Captain S.B. Haines and Lieutenant J.R. Wellsted on the coast of Oman in 1834.¹⁰ This text, together with others recorded soon afterwards, enabled the South Arabian alphabet to be deciphered in the 1840s by two German scholars, H.F.W. Gesenius and E.R. Rödiger.¹¹

The origins of this alphabet remained obscure until very recently. A certain relationship with the Phoenician alphabet has long been recognised, as some signs are identical in the two alphabets (*ʿ, ḏ*) or demonstrate a close resemblance (*g, l, n, q, š*). Nevertheless, the existence of different signs suggests two independent traditions with a common origin, each with its own order for the letters which survives to the present. Our own alphabet has preserved the essentials of the Phoenician alphabet, whereas the Ethiopian syllabary has preserved the South Arabian order. The basis for this hypothesis was the discovery in 1950–51, during American excavations of Hajar Kuḥlān in the Wādī Bayḥān, of a pavement made up of stone slabs, each of which bore a South Arabian letter to indicate the respective position of the slabs; some of these signs were, however, difficult to read, leading to different interpretations of the evidence.¹² In the last quarter of a century, however, numerous other alphabets have been found: first some fragmentary Sabaeen texts, then a Minaean rock-cut inscription at al-'Ula consisting of twenty-six of the twenty-nine signs, and finally a Qatabanian inscription which has enabled the complete alphabet to be reconstructed.¹³ This order is also that of other branches of the South Arabian script, for instance in Lihyanite and, of course, in Ethiopian inscriptions written in South Arabian script.¹⁴ A decisive step was taken by a Russian scholar, A.G. Lundin, who in 1987 proposed a new interpretation of a tablet inscribed in Ugaritic cuneiform, which had been found in 1933 during American excavations at Beth Shemesh in southern Palestine, and which dated to the thirteenth century BC: it was an alphabet arranged in the same order as South Arabian.¹⁵ This discovery allowed two essential deductions to be made, namely that the south Semitic alphabet was as old as the Phoenician and that its origin was also to be sought in the Fertile Crescent. Furthermore, in 1990 the French excavators at Ras Shamra/Ugarit also found a cuneiform alphabet of south Semitic type, so it is, henceforth, clear that the two traditions existed from the beginning.¹⁶ It now remains to be explained what

these two traditions represented and why one spread exclusively in the Arabian peninsula.

The question of how long the South Arabian script was used in ancient Yemen needs to be addressed. As mentioned above, the present tendency is to date the earliest royal inscriptions to the beginning of the seventh century BC. This must have been preceded by a formative period of unknown duration. At the other end of South Arabian history, the most recent inscription bears a date which corresponds to AD 554. In total, therefore, South Arabian inscriptions cover a period of some thirteen or fourteen centuries. There is certainly a clear evolution of the script during this period of time, but until recently it was thought that there had been no radical modification, unlike the situation with the Phoenician alphabet and its derivatives. This view still holds good with regard to the stone-cut, monumental script: during this long period, only three or four stages in its development can easily be identified, and the development from one stage to the next was so gradual as to be barely distinguishable, thus making it extremely difficult to use palaeography for the precise dating of inscriptions (fig. 53).

In a first stage, which could be termed archaic, the proportions of the letters were not yet established and certain forms are present which were later to disappear. The general impression is clumsy and lacks harmony. With the royal inscriptions of the seventh century, the script reached perfection with a very marked geometric aspect: each letter is inscribed in a rectangle and has at least one, if not two, symmetrical axes. The general appearance is harmonious and severe, without any decorative embellishments. Until about the fourth century BC the inscriptions are boustrophedon; that is, the lines of writing are read alternately from right to left and from left to right (fig. 54).

Over time this canon changed, with the script

becoming at times squatter or more slender. Its geometric character gradually lessens, the angles become more rounded and curving lines become more sinuous. The extremities of the uprights of the letters become wider at first; later they flare out. The appearance of the script can vary from one inscription to the next and it becomes softer and less imposing. However, this development does not necessarily apply to regional scripts, and the evolution of Qatabanian is not exactly the same as that of Sabaeen.

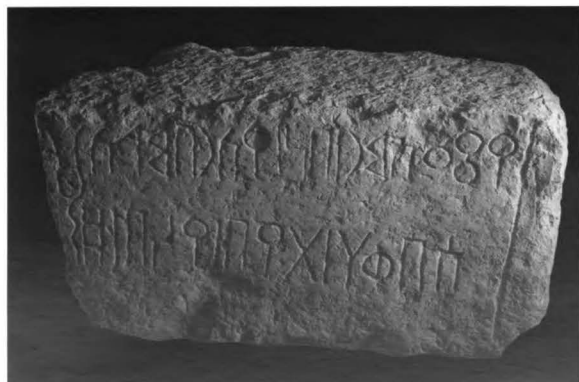
With the appearance of monotheism towards the beginning of the fourth century AD, these tendencies amplify and combine to form a script which can be termed baroque, and which loses its clarity. Most inscriptions are henceforth carved in relief. Alongside the monumental inscriptions, however, there are also graffiti which are very basic and lack any aesthetic pretensions; they bear some resemblance to the scripts of the nomads of central and northern Arabia.¹⁷

Finally, as has been mentioned above, a third type of script has recently been identified which must have been widely used in antiquity for day-to-day transactions. This minute script, which derived from the monumental script, was inscribed on small sticks or palm-leaf stalks. Two examples appeared on the antiquities market around 1970 and were studied by the Palestinian scholar M. Ghul.¹⁸ From the 1980s onwards, these texts were sold in the Šana'a' souk by the score and now hundreds of them are known. They come from clandestine excavations, probably in the Jawf and more precisely from the site of Nashān; some examples have also been discovered during the Russian excavations at Raybūn in the Ḥaḍramawt.¹⁹ Thanks to this abundant documentation, it is now possible to trace the evolution of the script from forms that are almost identical to those of the monumental script, which must go back to the seventh century BC, to the most recent texts, some of which are dated to the end of the fourth century AD. The script becomes increasingly cursive and more and more difficult to decipher, with many of the letters becoming almost identical. The exploitation of this exceptional resource has only just begun, but it has revealed aspects of the pre-Islamic civilisation of the Yemen which had previously remained hidden. The Belgian scholar J. Ryckmans has undertaken a detailed analysis of the development of this script, and has been able to establish a relative chronology for the documents, but their decipherment and translation are still awaited.²⁰



FIG. 53 Detail of inscription in the Awwām temple.

FIG. 54 Limestone boustrophedon inscription referring to the building of a temple to the god Hawbas; from north of Mārib. (Mārib Museum, BAR 7, Yemen)



Inscriptions

199 Inscribed pottery sherds

Yalā

12th–9th centuries BC

H 9.5 cm, D 5.4 cm; H 12 cm, D 10.5 cm; L 8.5 cm,
W 1.4 cm, L 10.3 cm, W 4.5 cm; L 7.2 cm, W 3.5 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a

YM 6112, 6117, 6110, 6114, 6115, 6113

The Yalā archaeological complex is located between the Wādī Yalā and the Wādī Qawqah, two tributaries of the Wādī Dhana in the eastern Khawlan aṭ-Ṭiyāl, about 30 km south-west of Marib. The Italian Mission, under the direction of Dr Alessandro de Maigret, discovered a Sabaeen city at Yalā/ad-Durayb and numerous associated archaeological remains at al-Gafnah and Ṣi'b al-Aql during a survey of the region in 1985 (de Maigret ed. 1988).

Yalā/ad-Durayb, identified with ancient Hafarī, was a Sabaeen city surrounded by a 580-m long and 4.5-m high defensive wall. The wall was built of rough-hewn stone blocks and had alternating buttresses and recesses; it was built to protect and extend an earlier settlement, which was not fortified but was defended by a ring of interconnected buildings. A raised area of ruins, known as the 'upper city', was located in the south-eastern sector and occupied two-thirds of the walled area. There were around twenty structures in the 'lower city', which was located in the northern and western parts of the enclosed area (de Maigret ed. 1988, 10–11).

A Sabaeen house (House A) and its underlying deposits were excavated by the Italian Mission in 1987 in order to explore the sequence of building and rebuilding in the walled citadel of Yalā (de Maigret and Robin 1989). House A was located in the upper city and faced east onto a road that led from the centre to the northern sector of the upper city. The walls of the house were built of stone and were preserved up to a height of 5 m in places. The ground floor of the main house was divided into six rooms with extra rooms added onto either side of the building. The presence of an interior stone staircase suggests that the house had at least two floors. The location of the house and the size and quality of its construction suggest that the inhabitants had an elevated status (de Maigret and Robin 1989, 280). It is quite possible that the dwellings were like the tower-houses that can be seen today in old



199a



199b



200

Marib or in Ṣana'a'. The destruction of the House A by fire was probably associated with the abandoning of the city around 600 BC (de Maigret 1997, 50).

On the basis of radiocarbon dates and pottery parallels with the early levels of Hajar ibn Ḥumayd, de Maigret suggests that

this group of South Arabian inscribed pottery sherds from levels A and B of House A date to between the twelfth and the ninth centuries BC and are among the oldest examples of writing in Yemen. The inscriptions are in Sabaeen and are usually personal names, some of which have only ever been attested in North Arabia. Some of the inscriptions were inscribed before the vessel was fired whereas others were scratched into the surface after firing, presumably by the owner of the vessel.

200 Painted potsherds

Raybūn

13th/12th–late 8th/early 7th centuries BC

H 25 cm (max.), L 12 cm (max.)

The Say'ūn Museum, SM 2531, 2570

Joint Soviet–Yemeni excavations from 1983 to 1991 at the large settlement site of Raybūn have provided important new evidence for the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age in the western Wādī Ḥaḍramawt. A temple of the goddess dhāt-Ḥimyam was also excavated at the site. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal from a residential area puts the excavated remains between the thirteenth/twelfth and late eighth/early seventh centuries BC. A new type of handmade painted pottery was defined here, the distribution of which extends to other sites in the Wādī Ḥaḍramawt: the earliest variety of this pottery at Raybūn was decorated with a burnished dark red slip. Some of these vessels also had rows of rivet-

like conical knobs or bichrome painted bands below the rim. The later variety often depicts rows of ibexes, antelopes or goats and ostriches. Two sherds were inscribed in monumental South Arabian script with the single letters *bdt* and *ln*; several sherds with graffiti'd inscriptions were also recovered from later occupation phases and the surface (Sedov 1996). Together with the inscribed sherds from Yalā, these are the earliest known inscriptions from South Arabia. Owing to the simple fact that ordinary pottery was inscribed, they imply a wider level of literacy at the end of the second millennium than indicated by the few surviving inscriptions, and hint at the probable early use of perishable writing materials. The use of such materials during the latter half of the first millennium BC is proven by the discovery of inscribed wooden sticks (see cat. 205).

201 Limestone inscription commemorating construction by a Sabaean ruler

Širwāh

8th century BC

H 31.5 cm, w 107 cm, TH 23 cm

The National Museum, Šana'a, YM 16465

This inscription, reported by Halévy (1872), is one of the oldest examples of Sabaean writing. The inscription reads 'Sumhū'alay Yanūf, son of Yitha'amar, constructed Yaf'an'. The text commemorates the building of a palace or enclosure wall called Yaf'an' by Sumhū'alay Yanūf, son of Yitha'amar, ruler of Saba' (Seipel ed. 1998, 92–5).

202 Limestone inscription possibly commemorating the building of a private shrine

Mārib

7th century BC

H 65.2 cm, w 56 cm

The Military Museum, Šana'a, MiM 149

The boustrophedon inscription reads:

[...] By 'Ahtar, by 'Almaqah, by dhāt-Ḥimyam, [by Ka]rib'il, by Sumhū'alay, by Hālik, the son of Dhamar'alī, and by Lahay'athar, his father. Iliqadam has entrusted his private shrine to Hawbas and 'Almaqah.

This text is a striking example of the 'classical' writing style during the reign of the Sabaean ruler, Karib'il the Great (who is



201



202

probably mentioned in line three of the text), at the beginning of the seventh century BC. The letters – with the exception of the circular ones – are of equal size, and each one is written in a rectangle whose width is a third of its height. The letter lines are straight and show no thickening at the ends. The text invokes the deities of the official Sabaean pantheon, the rulers Karib'il and Sumhū'alay, a royal prince Hālik, son of Dhamar'alī, who was probably the brother of Karib'il and, lastly, the father of the dedicant. At the end of the text Iliqadam added (from left to right) the symbol of 'Almaqah, a monogram composed of the letters of his name and then another unknown symbol, perhaps the sign of the goddess Hawbas (Seipel ed. 1998, 95).



203

203 Limestone statue base with the name of the first King of Qatabān

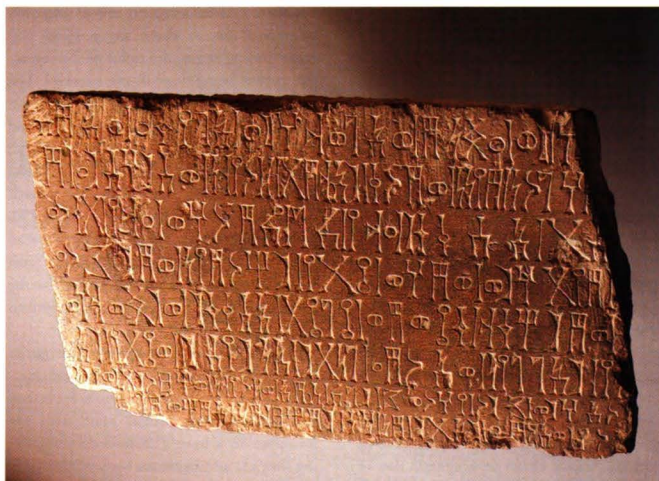
Tamna' or Hajar ibn Ḥumayd

c. 700 BC

H 14 cm, L 25 cm

The Bayhān Museum, BaM 36

The boustrophedon inscription marked on all four sides reads: '[monogram] [...] [monogram] Haytha', [... the son of Ili]wakil, servant of Waraw'il, has dedicated [the person] 'Urr'amar to the god 'Athtar.' This inscription is the oldest preserved from the kingdom of Qatabān. King Waraw'il is also mentioned as an ally of Karib'il the Great (Seipel ed. 1998, 154). The monogram on the left-hand side of the stone is the dynastic symbol of the rulers of Qatabān (Avanzini *et al.* 1994, 19–20), which is also to be found on their coins; the symbol on the right-hand side has not been identified.



204

204 Limestone inscription referring to the building of a palace and the latest reference to the Himyarite King Shammar Yuḥar'ish

Baynūn

AD 320–30

H 29 cm, W 48.5 cm, TH 9 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 1695

This inscription was found at the ancient Himyarite settlement of Baynūn in the Yemeni highlands. The fragmentary text reads:

[...] and their sons Iliyafa' [...] of the city of Baynūn and of Bariq, vassals of dhū-Raydān and Sumḥūsami' [...] five storeys in his entire property up to the upper part [...] of their palace, and in this two audience halls and in the ownership [...] and in a tower they completed three storeys and the reception hall [...] two reservoirs, four fenced gardens and two [...] with the help] of their lord Shammar Yuḥar'ish, the King of Saba' and dhū-Raydān, of Ḥaḍramawt and Yamna[... in the year] four hundred and twenty [...] of the era of Mabḥūd, the son of Abḥad.

The last numeral is missing from the date; therefore, the text can only be dated to a year between 420 and 429 of the Himyarite calendar, or to between AD 320 and 330. The era of Mabḥūd the son of Abḥad, which is

also called the Himyarite era, began in April 110 BC. This Himyarite text, which is the last from the reign of Shammar Yuḥar'ish, was written after the union of southern Arabia (Seipel ed. 1998, 378–9). The inscription is also of great interest because it mentions the construction of a palace with several storeys and thus proves that the well-known multi-storey architecture of traditional Yemen was deeply rooted in antiquity (see this volume, Chapter 9).

from an archaeological context are some twenty-two specimens excavated in a domestic area and temple of the goddess dhāt-Ḥimyam at Raybūn and dating between the sixth and first centuries BC (Frantsouzoff 1999).

The sticks are incised in a previously unknown South Arabian script, designated by scholars as minuscule or *zabīr* script, which is described in Arabic Classical sources and differed from the so-called *musnad* script, the general name given to the formal monumental script used for most inscriptions on hard materials such as stone and bronze. In a Qatabanian inscription, we are told that the king gave an order to write his edict in two copies, one on stone and the other on wood. Notably, a considerable number of these sticks are inscribed in the monumental *musnad* script and even in a very archaic type which gives the impression that wood was used alongside stone as a writing material from the earliest times and doubtless the development of the minuscule script was associated with writing on wood. Nevertheless, recent epigraphic discoveries from the Maḥram Bilqis prove that the minuscule script was also engraved on hard materials such as calcite-alabaster by attaching a sharp metal head to the tip of a stylus. It is interesting that the scribe often incised his name and indicated this with the phrase 'written by' and adding his signature.

These new documents are written primar-

205 Inscribed wooden sticks

As-Sawda'

1st–3rd centuries AD

L 20.3 cm, D 1.5 cm; L 16.4 cm, D 3 cm;

L 23.4 cm, D 2.5 cm; L 20.1 cm, D 2.5 cm;

L 17 cm, D 1.7 cm; L 48 cm, D 3.2 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a'.

YM 10217, 10220, 10329, 10729, 11752, 10790

Usually written on ribs of date palm or *Zizyphus spina Christi* ('ilb tree'), thousands of these inscriptions have reportedly been discovered at as-Sawda' (ancient Nāshān) in the Jawf where they are believed to have formed the archives of the temple of the supreme South Arabian god 'Athtar. Most measure between 10 and 30 cm long and between 2 and 5 cm wide and the texts are one to fifteen lines in length. For the purpose of storage, many were perforated so that they could be attached to the walls. Thus far, the only examples to be recovered

ily in the Sabaean dialect, which is the best known dialect of old South Arabian. Apart from the language of these texts, which has its own peculiarities, the most difficult aspect in studying these texts is the decipherment of the script. Nevertheless, the decipherment, which began after the discovery of these texts in the early 1970s, has now reached a satisfactory stage and over thirty texts have been fully published. These documents are dated approximately from the eighth century BC to the fourth century AD (Ryckmans, Müller and 'Abdullah 1994).

The real importance of the sticks lies in their content, which includes correspondence, messages, accounts, transactions, contracts or private agreements, abecedaries, debts, decrees, receipts, name lists and school exercises. They therefore significantly add to our understanding of daily life in southern Arabia. Other texts contain lists of the names of men, women, soldiers and tribes who doubtless were involved in important state works. Other toponymic lists of cities are attested. Many texts deal with the delivery of goods such as salt, flour, cereals (especially wheat, barley and sorghum), sesame and dates, as well as the delivery of cattle and coins. Most of these delivery texts specify that the goods are of royal trademark (*ʔt l... rmm*). Several texts mention different kinds of ancient Yemeni measures such as *qnt/mlkn* 'a royal measurement' (see cat. 166). Some documents mention sacrifices in relation to tribes, thus giving the sense that the tribes had the duty of bringing sacrifices to the temples.

Another important category deals with contracts and religious legal decrees, including one prohibiting infanticide. Private

contracts add information about irrigation systems or details about sheep, goats and cattle-grazing rights, the rights of the respective parties being fixed in the contract. The style and legal terminology of these contracts have similarities to those of later periods and also recall the famous law code of the Babylonian King Hammurabi (1792–50 BC) whereby the rights and duties of shepherds were protected (Pritchard ed. 1950, 163–80). This is an indication that Sabaean culture was a highly organised society. Such private contracts are an expression for the respect of customary law and prescriptions of the state.

One of the best-documented categories among the sticks includes letters and messages. There is a typical formula for letters in Sabaean. They usually start with the formula, 'To x from y', followed by a greeting formula and the main body of the letter, and concluding with another special formula. Many of the letters are between private individuals but royal correspondence is also found. The letters deal primarily with trade and delivery of goods, coins and animals, and several letters mention women involved in economic relations. The private letters are of particular interest; for instance, in one letter a woman enquires after another woman's health after an illness. The writer complains in her letter that she has not heard from the other for a long time and asks her to answer immediately. The Sabaean correspondence has the general style of the ancient Near Eastern letters such as Aramaic and Akkadian.

MM

1 The wood is also a source of roofing beams, the leaves provide fodder and the berries are edible.

Religion

ALEXANDER SIMA

He [the hoopoe] lingered nearby and said:
 'I have encompassed what you have previously not
 encompassed. And come to you from Sheba with
 tidings true. I have found a woman ruling over them.
 She has had something of everything bestowed upon
 her and has a great throne. I found her and her people
 bowing down before the sun rather than God.

(From 'The Ant', Qur'ān 27: 22–4)



FIG. 55 View of the Bar'an temple, Mārib. (Photo: A. Porter)

According to the Qur'ān (27:17–24), when King Solomon assembled an army of men, djinns and birds, he noticed the unexplained absence of the hoopoe. After this bird finally arrived at the court of Solomon it told the king that it had been to Saba' and returned with the astonishing news that there reigned a queen of incredible richness in that country but that she and her people worshipped the sun.

Sun worship is thus how the Qur'ān and the Islamic Arab tradition conceived pre-Islamic religion in ancient South Arabia. During the Islamic period the interest in ancient Yemen focused on genealogies, famous kings and heroes and above all on the monumental buildings whose remains could be seen even after the glory of their founders had vanished – yet there was no interest in South Arabian paganism (figs 55–6). It is therefore not surprising to find in classical Arabic works on pre-Islamic Arabia only dispersed and often heavily distorted names of pre-Islamic deities: even an expert on pre-Islamic Yemen such as al-Hamdani, who died in AD 945, failed to mention anything of importance on the pre-monotheistic religions of Yemen in the surviving four volumes of his *Iktilā'*.¹

The only source for the religions of ancient southern Arabia, therefore, are the thousands of inscriptions which survive from ancient Yemen. These texts are dated approximately between the tenth century BC and sixth century AD, of which some 4,000 are written in Sabaean, the language of the Sabaean kingdom in the western part of Yemen. The remaining inscriptions are written in Minaean, Qatabanian and Ḥaḍramitic, the official languages of the homonymous kingdoms lying to the north and south-east of the Sabaean territory.²

GODS AND GODDESSES

In the oldest Sabaean inscriptions originating from the oasis of Mārib at the edge of the so-called 'Empty Quarter', the great inner Arabian desert, five deities are

invoked, namely 'Athtar, Hawbas, 'Almaqah, dhāt-Ḥimyam and dhāt-Ba'danum. Their sequence reflects their importance: while 'Athtar – behind whose name one recognises the Babylonian Ishtar, although in southern Arabia this was a male deity – was worshipped in all South Arabian kingdoms, the other four were restricted to Saba'. The second deity, Hawbas, was the female counterpart of 'Athtar. The third deity, 'Almaqah, was some form of 'national' deity of Saba'.

ties; for instance, the most prominent male deity was Ta'lab, who had his cult-centre in Riyām, north of Ṣana'a', together with his female counterpart who was called Nawsham. Besides the deities mentioned above there were a great number of local deities only very rarely attested in the texts. Most of them are only known by name, and since their nature, function and cult remain in total obscurity, it is unnecessary to treat them here.

FIG. 56 Limestone temple altar with pseudo-architectural decoration, from Kamna, c. 8th century BC. (Military Museum I 3630, Ṣana'a', Yemen)



Although 'Athtar, who was certainly a very old deity, ranked highest in esteem, in the official Sabaeen cult the deity 'Almaqah plays the most important role. The structure of the last two names, dhāt-Ḥimyam and dhāt-Ba'danum, points to their female sex but otherwise very little is known about them. In Middle Sabaeen times they were often replaced by the 'new' deity Shamsun, who was a solar deity.

The pantheon of the western highlands was identical with that of the Mārib region. However, apart from those deities whose worship certainly reflects the political dominance of the capital Mārib, the inscriptions from the highlands show some peculiari-

What can be said about the nature of these Sabaeen deities amounts to very little, although Shamsun was most certainly a solar goddess; as Shamsun in Middle Sabaeen times often replaces the older deities dhāt-Ḥimyam and dhāt-Ba'danum, these may also have been some sort of sun deities. As for 'Athtar, it has been proposed that he may have been the deity of the morning star but this simply relies on the etymological connection of his name with the Babylonian Ishtar and cannot be confirmed by any direct evidence from southern Arabia. Furthermore, the lunar nature of 'Almaqah and Ta'lab is speculative and even less can be stated about the female goddesses Hawbas and Nawsham.

Since the beginning of Sabaean studies there have been a number of proposals equating the main deities with special stars, namely 'Athtar as the morning star, 'Almaqah and Ta'lab as the moon, and dhāt-Himyan and dhāt-Ba'danum as the sun. However, since we are still lacking any epigraphic evidence which might substantiate this, the exact nature of these deities remains obscure. In addition, there is a complete lack of mythological texts which might have helped elucidate the internal structure of the pantheon in the way that Hesiod's *Theogony* has contributed to our knowledge of Greek mythology.



FIG. 57 Votive inscription to the god Sayin, from al-Quff, Wādi al-'Ayn, Ḥaḍramawt, 2nd–1st centuries BC. (Sayūn Museum, Yemen, SM7)

Only a few dispersed hints testify to the existence of such concepts. In one text (probably from Ṣirwāḥ), we find an invocation of 'Athtar, Hawbas, 'Almaqah and 'the Son of Hawbas', although it is unknown who this last-mentioned deity might be.³ In one Ḥaḍramitic inscription 'Athtar is called 'father' of the Ḥaḍramitic deity Sayin.⁴ Sadly, these are the poor remnants of what was in antiquity certainly a much richer South Arabian mythology which must have been comparable to that of ancient Greece or Mesopotamia.

The pantheon of the Minaeans, who lived in the Yemeni Jawf – north-west of the Sabaean capital

Mārib – was quite different from their neighbours. Their main deity was Wadd, whose name has probably some connection to the root *wdd ('love'), although his nature and function are unknown. In addition, the Minaeans worshipped Nakrah, and certainly 'Athtar (with the surname dhū-Qabḍ), who was invoked throughout southern Arabia.

The national deity of the Qatabanians was 'Amm, thus they are often called 'children of 'Amm'. His name could be connected with the Semitic word for 'uncle'. Besides him there were two other deities of major importance, 'Anbay and his female counterpart Ḥawkam, giving rise to the title of the Qatabanian king as 'first-born of 'Anbay and Ḥawkam'. Finally, other Qatabanian deities of minor importance are Warafu, 'Athirah, dhāt-Ṣantim and dhāt-Zahrān.

The Ḥaḍramitic pantheon is the least known in southern Arabia owing to the fact that the number of known Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions is – compared to the three other states/languages – still very limited. At the top of the Ḥaḍramitic pantheon stood a deity whose name was constantly written SYN. This name was previously thought to be vocalised as Sīn and thus connected with the well-known north Semitic moon deity, Sīn. However, the South Arabian orthography and the testimony of the *Natural History* of Pliny the Younger point to a vocalisation, Sayin, so the form Sīn should be abandoned. The Ḥaḍramitic sources give no hint of his nature and even his connection with the moon is merely speculative.

In addition to those panthea at the 'national' level there were a large number of deities of regional or local importance who cannot be discussed in depth here, although of particular interest is the religious situation in the north of the Jawf. Several early city states existed in this region, namely Haram, Kamna and Nashān, with their own rather distinctive panthea. For instance, in Haram the deities Halfan, Marabnatayan and Yuda'a-sumhu were worshipped, whereas Madahwu and Nab'al were venerated in Kamna, and in Nashān a deity called Aranyada' was revered. The vocalisation of these names is more or less guesswork, their etymology remains rather enigmatic and a few do not appear to be Semitic at all. When the Minaeans conquered these cities the local panthea disappeared from the texts but worship must have continued in the epigraphic 'underground' because when Minaean power diminished and they finally had to give up the northern Jawf, these deities do reappear in inscriptions.

From the first century onwards North Arabian people started to emigrate to southern Arabia where they mainly served as soldiers in the Middle Sabaean army. They brought with them their own deities previ-

FIG. 58 Altar with dedicatory inscription from the Bar'ān temple, Mārib (cat. 207).



FIG. 59 Dedicatory stela describing a pilgrimage to the temple of 'Almaqah, Mārib (cat. 206).

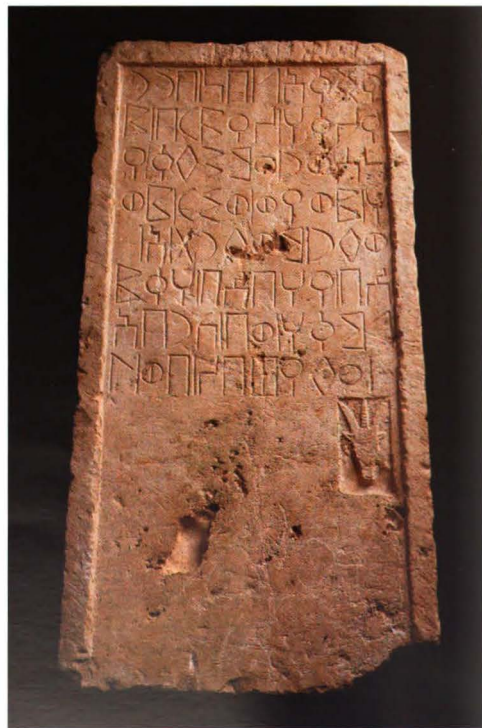
ously unknown in southern Arabia. Among these, the female deities (al-)Lāt, (al-)Uzzā and Manāt are well known, as they are mentioned in the famous Satanic verses of Sura 53 ('The star') of the Qur'ān and in South Arabian texts of the first four centuries of the first millennium AD. Their cult was confined to north Arabian immigrants, only (al-)Uzzā was to some extent integrated into the South Arabian pantheon.

RELIGIOUS INSCRIPTIONS

The inscribed material provides neither a clear picture of the nature of all those deities nor the mythological concepts of how they were interrelated, yet nevertheless they do offer some important insights into daily religious life. Most inscriptions belong to the category of dedications: many texts from old Sabaean times (about the eighth to fourth century BC) contain only a short formula of the type 'person A dedicated person B'. It has been suggested that these texts bear witness to the sacrifice of human beings but this seems quite improbable as South Arabian texts differentiate precisely between 'dedicate' (*hḡny*) and sacrifice (*dbh*). Today, most specialists would agree that such texts do not testify to human sacrifice but that the persons mentioned in such dedications were most likely given into the possession of the temple in order to fulfil some duties within it or simply to work for it. In Middle Sabaean times the formulaic changes and the dedicated person is replaced by a bronze statue. Dedications of the type 'person A dedicated to the

deity B this bronze statue' are the most frequent type of text in the Middle Sabaean period.

Most Middle Sabaean dedicatory inscriptions are motivated by the hope that the deity will help with some problem or they offer thanks for favour shown. There are two topics mentioned very often, victory in war, and childbirth. Since the Middle Sabaean period was a time of constant war between the South Arabian states, it was quite natural that people expressed their gratitude for their return from the battlefield or for obtaining booty; and childless families or families whose children died prematurely asked for or thanked divine intervention for the survival of future offspring. Occasionally – if the deity showed favour – the dedicant promised to fulfil a pilgrimage or give some precious objects to the temple. In this context one of the most important functions of South Arabian deities has to be mentioned, namely the oracle. All major deities were asked for oracular decisions in almost all circumstances of human life, such as when people started a war or when they hoped for children. There are a large number of texts in which some precious object is dedicated to the temple either because



the dedicant had consulted the oracle or the deity had pronounced a favourable decision.

Pilgrimage played an important part in South Arabian religious life (fig. 59). A large third-century-BC inscription from the highland site of Riyām contains precise prescriptions as to when and how the pilgrim-



FIG. 60 View of the Nakrah temple at Barāqish during excavation by the Italian Archaeological Mission.
(Photo: J. Jackson)

age to Ta'lab of Riyām should be fulfilled, how many animals should be slaughtered during the days of pilgrimage and what should be done in which temple.⁵ There are many inscriptions testifying to an individual's successful pilgrimage to the temple of a certain deity, during which the temple and/or the local authorities have paid for the provisions of the pilgrim. This is also mentioned in the *Natural History* of Pliny the Younger, as his description of the religious life of the ancient Ḥaḍramitic capital, Shabwa, includes reference to the feeding of pilgrims by the deity SYN. The main temple of SYN in Shabwa is called 'Im, which may be related to Arabic *uwalima* ('banquet') and thus confirm Pliny's story. Such cultic banquets, in which the deity feeds the pilgrims, are also attested in the inscription from Riyām mentioned earlier.

THE RISE OF MONOTHEISM

The last three centuries of South Arabian history, the 'Late Sabaean period', are often called the 'monotheistic period'. From the middle of the fourth century AD the monotheistic religions of Christianity and Judaism start to replace the traditional South Arabian religions. The first monotheistic inscriptions are dated to the year AD 378 (or 383) and from then onwards there is no further witness of pagan worship. Certainly, the traditional religion did not cease overnight but it is astonishing that pagan deities are not even mentioned after this date. Perhaps even before the rise of monotheism the traditional religions had already become weak and lost their

attractiveness, but a decisive factor seems to be that the conversion started with the upper classes, as the royal family and the aristocracy are the first converts to monotheism, followed by the lower classes. This impression of a very rapid conversion to monotheism is strengthened by the fact that the epigraphic material mostly stems from the upper classes and does not reflect the situation of the lower social classes.

Byzantine church historians inform us that in the 330s AD the Byzantine Emperor Constantius (337–61) sent a Christian missionary to southern Arabia. However, his efforts appear to have been in vain: only Najrān in the north (in present-day Saudi Arabia) became a famous centre of the Christian religion and possibly the best known in the entire Arabian peninsula. The monotheistic period, then, is mainly a period of Judaism. This is testified by Jewish words and phrases in Sabaean texts, even Jewish personal names, such as Yehuda, and the reference to the 'tribe Israel'.⁶ In the Sabaean texts 'god' is called 'Raḥmānān', the merciful, the 'master of heaven and earth'.

The best known event in this last period of South Arabian history is without doubt the persecution of the Christians during the reign of the Jewish King dhū Nuwās, around AD 523. This event is not only attested in three Sabaean inscriptions but also in Greek, Syriac, Arabic and Ethiopic sources. The Jewish king burned down Christian churches in Ḥaḍramawt and finally attacked the centre of South Arabian Christianity in Najrān. The Christian population of Najrān, with their leader Ḥārith (Arethas in Greek), was slaughtered, an event that continues to be remembered in Byzantine and Oriental Christianity.

This persecution of the Christians of Najrān led to a reaction from the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia, whose army invaded southern Arabia, killed the Jewish king and established Ethiopian hegemony over at least the western part of Yemen. It was only during the following period of Ethiopian rule that Christianity played a dominant role in this region (from c. 525 to 575). The inscriptions of the Ethiopian viceroy and later King of Saba', Abraha, commence with the Trinitarian formula 'in the name of god (Raḥmānān!) and his Messiah and the Holy Spirit'. Since there are very few Sabaean inscriptions from the period of the Ethiopian occupation it is not known if Christianity was imposed on the whole population or whether it effectively remained a 'court religion'.

After the Ethiopians were defeated by the Sasanians in c. 575, the inscriptional evidence comes to an end and the last phase of pre-Islamic Yemen remains in total obscurity until Islamic sources state that Bādhān, the last Sasanian governor of the Yemen, converted to Islam in AD 628.

Cult furnishings

206 Limestone stela mentioning a pilgrimage to the temple of 'Almaqah at Mārib

Possibly Mārib

End of 8th century BC

H 85 cm, W 40 cm, TH 10 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 375

This eight-line inscription in archaic boustrophedon script (see fig. 59) refers to the dedication of this stela following a priest's pilgrimage to the temple of 'Almaqah:

Yasiq'il, son of Barir, the Baramite, dedicated to Niswar 'Ammishafaq, when he was a priest and when he made the pilgrimage of 'Almaqah, in the month of Abhī. By 'Almaqah, by Karib'il and by Nabatyafa' (Seipel ed. 1998, 309).

According to J. Ryckmans (1951) Abhī was the month of the annual pilgrimage in Mārib, an event which was accompanied by sacrifices and a ritual meal, from which derive the remains of butchered and burnt animal bones excavated in a refuse dump in the Awwām temple complex (Glanzman 2002). The carved ibex head was intended to have an apotropaic function for the dedication rather than being a reference to the type of animal sacrificed.

207 Limestone altar dedicated to 'Almaqah

Mārib, Bar'an temple

7th–6th centuries BC

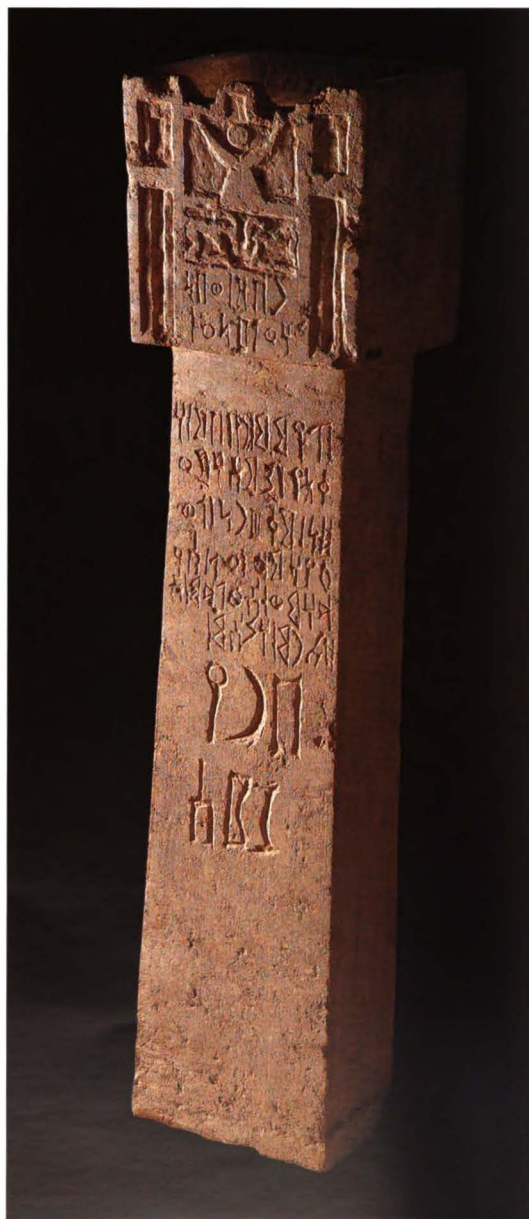
H 75 cm, W 50 cm, TH 38 cm, lettering H 7 cm

The Mārib Museum, B2/4A (DAI-Bar'an 1988-1)

This is the best preserved of three altars found in the Bar'an temple. It was discovered in the deposit under the foundations of Temple 3 and therefore represents the oldest inscribed altar from the excavated area. It has a stepped base, 'false window' decoration on all sides and a protruding altar top with votive inscription (see fig. 58). Much of the altar still bears traces of red pigment. The inscription reads:

Bi'athtar, son of Sawād from the tribe Naw' from Nihm, has dedicated to 'Almaqah [the person] Fāri'at. By 'Athtar, by 'Almaqah and by dhāt-Ḥimyam. By Yada'il and by Ma'dikarib.

The dedicant Bi'athtar, who comes from the Nihm region, west of Mārib, dedicated



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the female person Fāri'at to the god 'Almaqah, presumably to serve in the temple employment. Yada'il and Ma'dikarib, who are invoked after the triad of gods, are the personal names of a *mukarrib* and a high-ranking official respectively (Seipel ed. 1998, 325).

208 Limestone altar dedicated to the sun goddess Shams

Possibly Mārib

4th–1st centuries BC

H 109 cm, w 27 cm

The Military Museum, Šana'a', MiM 193

The inscription on this particularly tall altar is not very well executed and is therefore difficult to date. The text reads:

Rabb and his son, members of the tribe Ghaym Rabīb, have dedicated this incense altar to their Shams [their patron goddess] for her welfare, and that she may give them healthy male descendants.
Prosperity to Shams (Seipel ed. 1998, 86).

209 Calcite-alabaster libation table inscribed with monograms

As-Sawda'

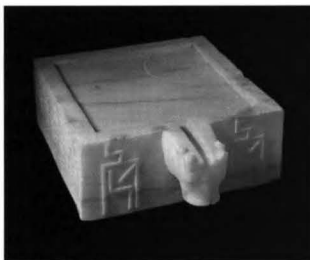
Late 8th–early 7th centuries BC

H 18 cm, w 47 cm, TH 47 cm

The National Museum, Šana'a', YM 16243

This libation table has royal monograms in raised relief on either side of the bull's head spout. The monograms belong to Labu'an, King of Nashān (as-Sawda'). Labu'an was the father of Nabatayafa', who was defeated by the Sabaean King Karib'il the Great (Seipel ed. 1998, 289–90).

The temple of 'Ahtar dhū-Riṣāf at as-Sawda' was excavated by the French Mission between 1988 and 1989. The temple was relatively small (15.5 x 14.1 m) and consisted of a thick outer wall surrounding a peristyle courtyard. Two pillars (5 m high and 93 cm wide) flanked the monumental entrance at the western end of the temple. An entrance passage, supported by an additional two pillars, led into the courtyard. Two rows of rectangular pillars, almost 4 m high, ran either side of the courtyard and supported a roof constructed of stone lintels and slabs, which covered a passageway that ran around the periphery of the courtyard. Benches were positioned between the pillars at the western end of the temple. In the



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eastern end of the temple, flanked by another two pillars, was a raised platform upon which were seven inscribed stone blocks in a hemispherical arrangement. The as-Sawda' temple is renowned for its state of preservation and for its decorated monolithic pillars which were embellished with elaborate incised decoration, including panels of chevrons, ibexes, intertwined snakes, people, inscriptions, vessels, spears and ostriches (see cat. 188). The temple is a remarkable example of South Arabian religious architecture dating to the eighth to seventh centuries BC (Breton 1997a, 136–7; Breton 1998c, 66–8).

210 Calcite-alabaster altar with ibexes

The Jawf

7th–6th centuries BC

H 61 cm, w 60 cm, TH 50 cm

The Military Museum, Šana'a', MiM 120

The sides of this tall limestone altar are decorated with architectural recesses and the front is dominated by a row of three ibexes standing on a protruding stepped podium, possibly carved in imitation of an altar surmounted by dedicatory figures which had been placed in front of a building.

211 Inscribed limestone ibex fixture

Ḥurayḍah, Sayin temple

6th century BC

H 103 cm, w 53 cm, TH 20 cm

The Mukalla Museum, MuM 219

The inscription carved on this object refers to Yada'ab Ghaylān, son of Sumhūriyām, *mukarrib* of Ḥaḍramawt. The Sabaean King Karib'il made an alliance with Yada'ab Ghaylān, son of Sumhūriyām, to ensure peaceful conditions for trade. The reference to *mukarrib* rather than King of the Ḥaḍramawt is significant because the Sabaean king may have also declared himself *mukarrib*, and this would have caused tensions between the two kingdoms (Breton 1999, 47). This inscription was not included in Caton-Thompson's excavation report on the site but has been dated to the sixth century BC with the suggestion that it is one of the oldest inscriptions found in the Ḥaḍramawt (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 102). This is one of several inscriptions from Ḥurayḍah which

suggest that the temple of Sayin is older than Caton-Thompson believed.

The Sayin temple was located in the middle of the once cultivated plain of the Wādī 'Amd. It was originally identified as a temple to the Semitic moon god Sin on the basis of a number of inscriptions referring to 'syn'; this is now read as Sayin, who is known to have been the chief deity of the Ḥaḍramawt (this volume, Chapter 11).

The site was first explored in 1937/8 by Caton-Thompson (1944); these were among the first excavations to be conducted within Yemen and, together with the finds from two tombs (see cats 243–62), formed an important milestone in the evaluation of ancient South Arabian material culture.

Three phases of temple construction were distinguished. The earliest remains, described as building phase A, included a raised stone rectangular temple platform measuring 12.5 x 9.8 m, with a coping course of marginally drafted and pecked masonry. The retaining wall of the platform was originally over 4 m high but evidence for the phase A temple had apparently not survived. The south-west façade of the temple was extended in phase B. There were phase B remains on the platform which included some stone plinths for wooden columns which would have originally supported a roof. Plaster and stone partition walls divided the south-west section of the temple into small courts and forecourts. Two flights of stone steps leading up to the temple platform were added during this second phase. The façade of the building was extended further in phase C and then the temple may have been abandoned but worship continued in the shrines below the main façade.

On the basis of the tomb contents (see cats 243–62) Caton-Thompson (1944) provisionally dated the temple phases A and B to the mid-fifth to fourth centuries BC, and the final phases to the third century BC or later on the basis of five uninscribed red-painted incense burners which she compared with examples from Gezer in Palestine (see cat. 102). W.F. Albright suggested that the incense burners actually dated to between the late seventh or sixth centuries BC and the fourth century BC, but he later revised his opinion on palaeographic grounds and dated the Ḥuraydah burners to the fourth to first centuries BC. Bowen dated the burners to the third to first centuries BC on the basis of parallels with inscribed examples from South

Arabia, a date which corroborated Caton-Thompson's original suggestion (Bowen 1958b, 150).

Forty-nine South Arabian inscriptions were found at the Sayin temple at Ḥuraydah as well as nine graffiti. The inscriptions from the temple, as well as from the tombs and the farmstead, were analysed by Professor G. Ryckmans (1944, 157–84). Ryckmans grouped the inscriptions into three different phases: archaic, archaic transitional and recent. Caton-Thompson suggested that the archaic inscriptions and the single archaic transitional inscription could be equated to the temple building phase A and the recent inscriptions with building phases B and C, although she admitted that this was difficult to prove (Caton-Thompson 1944, 29, 57–8). At the time, absolute dates for the inscriptions at Ḥuraydah could not be given because the study of Ḥaḍramitic inscriptions was in its infancy and there were very few other examples for comparison (Ryckmans 1944, 174). Palaeographic research has advanced considerably since then and the inscriptions can now shed some light on the antiquity of the temple.

Ryckmans classified twenty-one of the inscriptions from Ḥuraydah as 'archaic' and another as 'archaic transitional'. Even though the archaic inscriptions were not found *in situ*, Caton-Thompson suggested that they were contemporary with the early building phase A of the temple and could be dated to the middle of the fifth century BC to the fourth century BC (Caton-Thompson 1944, 57). The most ancient text discovered at Ḥuraydah, 'Caton-Thompson 44', was an archaic dedicatory inscription in boustrophedon to the god Sayin (Caton-Thompson 1944, pl. LXVII, 4; Ryckmans 1944, 171, 174). This particular text can be dated earlier than the fifth century BC on epigraphic grounds and probably dates to the seventh or eighth centuries BC, as do a number of other archaic inscriptions from Ḥuraydah (Robin 1996, 1107). These inscriptions suggest that the earlier phases of the temple can be dated to this period rather than to the fifth or fourth centuries BC (see cats 243–62).

212 Limestone stela commemorating a successful ibex hunt

The Jawf

1st–3rd centuries AD

H 33 cm, W 32 cm, TH 9 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 1131

The face of this fragmentary stela is carved with a series of panels showing in the centre a standing human figure holding a light composite bow and an ibex head with secondary scenes of a standing figure and an ibex being attacked by a dog. It probably commemorates a ritual ibex hunt, which is well attested in the ancient inscriptions and is still practised in the Ḥaḍramawt today (Serjeant 1976).



212

213 Inscribed tin-bronze altar with a dedication to the deity Rahmaw

Probably from Mārib

6th century BC

H 66 cm, W 110 cm, TH 34.5 cm

The British Museum, London.
ANE 1970-6-4, 1-2 = 135323 and 135324

This outstanding and thus far unique semi-complete bronze altar carries an incomplete Sabaeen inscription which can be translated as:

[...]il, son of 'Amm'anas, priest
of Rahmaw, dedicated to Rahmaw
Lahay'a that and Ṣabaḥhumaw when
[he performed the h]unt of 'Ahtar
dhū-Musawwātīm. By 'Ath[ar] ...



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The name of the dedicant is unfortunately not preserved but the inscription, which commences on the most completely preserved side, describes how the altar was dedicated to a previously unattested local deity called Rahmaw following completion of a successful hunting trip (Lundin and Frantsouzzoff 1997). Two joining portions of this altar survive, the first and largest of which consists of the front panel with three rows of standing sphinxes shown frontally, set below a lightly projecting cornice around which runs the beginning of a Sabaeen inscription. The raised letters were made by applying individual wax threads onto the panel before it was cast; the same technique was used to make bronze dedicatory plaques (cats 31, 220). The second fragment represents part of the corresponding back panel of the altar flanked by a projecting bull's head spout (Christie's 1970, no. 159; Barnett and Curtis 1973, 130, pl. LXIIb).

After acquisition in 1970 the thick heavy corrosion products which measured up to 5 cm thick in places and which obscured the surfaces were removed, not only revealing the inscription and decoration but also 'blow holes' resulting from the original casting and the almost-pure copper nails which had been used in antiquity to attach the metal onto a wooden core or frame (see also cat. 167). Traces of burning mixed with the corrosion suggests that the remains of the altar may have been discarded in an ashy deposit. Technical examination within the Department of Scientific Research also indicated that the main part of the altar was probably made as a single casting from several separate melts poured successively into a mould; the metal composition is almost uniform with c. 11–14 per cent tin added to c. 83–90 per cent copper with the usual minor trace elements of lead, zinc, iron and nickel. Smaller fragments from a second bronze altar also decorated with sphinxes but

made with a slightly different metal composition exist in the British Museum collection (Seipel ed. 1998, 297–8, no. 172; see also Costa 1978, 43, pl. XXII, no. 82).¹

¹ Unpublished reports (R.L. and Conservation File No. 2987).

214 Limestone altar

As-Sawda'

2nd century BC

H 41 cm, w 21 cm, TH 21 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1887-6-29.21 = 125141

The first half of this Sabaeen inscription (see fig. 20) reads:

Ha'la [Hi]byān, servant of the banū
[...].ram, dedicated to 'Athrar dhū-Riṣāf
the altar Ya'ūd, when he repaired and
reconstructed, the temple Arathat (Seipel
ed. 1998, 375).



215

215 Votive inscription from a woman giving thanks for the successful birth of her granddaughter

Possibly from the Jawf

1st–2nd centuries AD

H 35 cm, w 16 cm, TH 8 cm

The National Museum, Ṣanaʿa, YM 2403

This carefully ruled inscription refers to the dedication of a bronze statuette to the previously unknown god Hīrrān. It was commissioned by a grandmother called Magadhalak in gratitude for the saving of the life of her daughter Abihamad following the difficult birth of her own daughter who may have been called Khasafhīrrān. The text of the inscription reads:

Magadhala[k] from the tribe of the 'Aziz'il has dedicated and entrusted this statuette of bronze, which [depicts] her daughter Abihamad, the daughter of the Banū 'Aziz'il, to her patron god Hīrrān, when His servant Magadhalak [rosette] from the tribe of the 'Aziz'il promised it to Him, after her daughter Abihamad was confined at her house, and, verily, He has granted her the survival of her daughter for her

sake; may Hīrrān, the Lord of Rahbān, keep protecting His servant Khasafhīrrān from madness and confusion and stand by His servants, the Ban[ū 'Aziz']il, against the evil deeds and the baseness of their [enemies], whether known or unknown (Seipel ed. 1998, 312).

It is difficult to assess the position of women in ancient South Arabia. Often the texts refer to so-and-so and his wife, but this may not necessarily imply that monogamy was the rule (Beeston 1957, 103). The slab was later lain flat and reused as a door socket, hence the circular depression at one end.

216 Limestone libation table with bull's head spouts

Mārib, Barʿān temple

Possibly 1st century BC

l 84 cm, w 36.5 cm, TH 8.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 743

Limestone libation tables are often found in temple contexts. This particular one with a pair of bull's head spouts is very similar to a single-spouted example found on top of the



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well at the foot of the steps of the Bar'an temple. The water was drawn from the well and poured onto the stone slab, which flowed through the bull-headed gutter and into a stone basin (see also cat. 190).



217

**217 Limestone stela
with dedication to
the sun goddess Shams**

South of Ṣana'a'

1st century AD

H 49 cm, W 30 cm, TH 7 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 1965

The inscription reads:

Lahay'athar dhū-Na's dedicated to Shams, mistress of Fanwāt, this inscription conforming to what She ordered in Her oracle. That Shams increase grace and well-being (Seipel ed. 1998, 312).



218

**218 Calcite-alabaster base of
an altar with a votive inscription
to the god 'Almaqah**

Mārib, Bar'an temple

Early 7th century BC

H 44 cm, W 21 cm, TH 21 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 1877

It was typical to dedicate altars during the early Sabaean period, whereas later practice was to dedicate statues or statuettes. This boustrophedon inscription in raised relief attests to the dedication of a male person by the name of 'Ammī'ahar to the Sabaean god 'Almaqah. The inscription reads: 'Hayw, the

son of Kabīr'il, has dedicated 'Ammī'ahar to 'Almaqah. By Kabīr'il.' People dedicated to a deity were presumably admitted to the religious community of this deity and were employed in the service of the temple. On the left-hand side is a partial first engraving of the same inscription, in which the dedicant calls himself 'priest of 'Almaqah'; this title does not appear on the version worked in relief (Seipel ed. 1998, 90–92).



219

219 Bronze plaque with a lamp extended by a hand

Tamna', Hadath house, Room 13

First half of 1st century BC

H 20.5 cm, w (lower part) 13.8 cm,
w (upper part) 14.2 cm, lamp D 11.6 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TS 1121

This lamp is a unique piece. It was found beneath the statue of the Lady Bar'at (cat. 158) and came from the second storey of this house (Phillips 1955, 176). The Qatabanian dedication reads:



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Hamāt'amm Dharhān of the tribe Dharhān offered to his god and lord, the master of Yaghūl, a hand which is illuminated with an oil lamp and a dedication, conforming to that which he promised and assured Him. He committed to the master of Yaghūl his faculties, his powers and his offering against anyone who changes its place. By 'Amm, 'Anbay, dhāt-Himyam and with the master of Salbān (Seipel ed. 1998, 299).

220 Bronze plaque dedicated to the god 'Almaqah

'Amrān

1st-3rd centuries AD

H 20.5 cm, w 55.5 cm, TH 0.5 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1862-10-28.3 = E48455

Presented by Brigadier-Colonel

William Marcus Coghlan

The inscription reads:

Yuhafri' and his sons have dedicated this inscription to the god 'Almaqah of Hīrrān, because 'Almaqah heard them because of their prayers to him, that he would protect them and protect their children. And may 'Almaqah continue to show his favour to them and protect them in their vows which they have asked of him that they may be fulfilled, and may he obtain for them the goodwill of the princes of his people of Marthadum and may he free them from the insults and the harm of all their enemies, and because this has come to pass, and that it may come to pass for the sons of Yuhafri'.

The inscription indicates that it was a

dedication to the god 'Almaqah of Hīrān by Yuhafri' and his sons, clients of the Banū Marthadum who are described as 'their lords'. The decoration consists of a tongue ornament along the bottom and a row of triangular decoration above the inscription with a lion standing on a pedestal in front of a palm tree; the right side is broken off. This plaque was one of twenty-eight such panels found at 'Amrān and Shabwa which were presented to the British Museum in 1862 by Brigadier-Colonel (later Brigadier-General) Coghlan and his assistant Captain (later Sir) Robert Lambert Playfair (1828–99), the latter of the Royal Artillery and later appointed Her Majesty's Consul at Algiers (see also cat. 31).¹

The form of these plaques imitates that of a writing tablet with a wax-filled page enclosed within a wooden frame. They were produced using the lost-wax casting process, whereby the original was made by fashioning a wax panel of the same thickness as the intended plaque, adding separate threads of wax onto the face between incised rulings, shaping and correcting the letter forms with a tool before coating with clay, baking, introducing molten metal in place of the wax, removing the clay crust of the metal and polishing the surfaces. The slightly curved edges that characterise these panels resulted from the slight shrinkage of the wax original. A small number of clever forgeries are also known that were made in c. 1860 by a Jewish Yemeni metalsmith (Ryckmans 1978 = BM, ANE 1871-6-18,1-2 and 1871-11-13,1-2 = E48481-84, presented by Captain Prideaux).

¹ The plaques from 'Amrān, a small town north of Ṣana'a', appear to have been found during house construction; a number of other examples were apparently melted down (Schippmann 2001, 24–5; see also Rathjens 1953/5, vol. I, 26–37, pls 9–10).

221 Inscribed bronze hand dedicated to the god Tā'lab

Provenance uncertain
2nd–3rd centuries AD

l. 18.5 cm, w 11 cm, th 3.6 cm; 979.7 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1983-6-26,2 = 139443

The right hand is traditionally regarded as a powerful symbol of good fortune and is thus not only depicted as a trophy (cat. 26) but also as an apotropaic motif on dedicatory



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inscriptions (cat. 31) and, indeed, emphasised as a gesture of worshippers in their dedicatory statues and stelae (see cats 24–5, 124–5). The same function probably explains a small number of uninscribed bronze and plaster model hands in other collections (Calvet and Robin *et al.* 1997, 246, no. 171; Seipel ed. 1998, 335–6, nos 279–82). The form of dedicatory inscription on this object is typical of bronze inscriptions, yet this is the first example to be discovered on part of the body, a practice that is nevertheless attested in South Arabian inscriptions. This hand was dedicated to the god Tā'lab Riyām in the city of Ṣafār (see also cat. 29). The inscription reads:

Wahabta'lab, son of Hisam, the Yursamite, subject of the Banū Sukhaym, has dedicated to their patron Tā'lab Riyām this right hand in his memorial dhū-Qabrat in the city of Ṣafār, for his well being (Robin 1985).

The hand is very realistic and may have been modelled on an actual hand, perhaps of the dedicant. Examination within the Department of Scientific Research indicates that this object was made of leaded bronze, containing some traces of silver and nickel.¹ The object was cast using copper chaplets to hold the core, most of which were subsequently removed, however, sufficient remained for thermoluminescence testing to confirm the

purported age of the piece. The remains of two casting sprues are present at the wrist which indicate, firstly, that the metal was poured into the mould with the fingers pointing downwards and, secondly, that this is not a piece broken from a larger casting. There is evidence of work done on the surface after casting, including the addition of the inscription, which partly cuts a chaplet.

¹ Unpublished report (R.L. File No. 4943).

222 Bronze socketed arrowhead with dedicatory inscription

The Jawf

Possibly 1st century AD

H 12 cm, w 2.8 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 3828

The inscription on this large arrowhead appears to have been added later and suggests that it had been reused as a dedicatory offering within a temple although the inscription itself has not yet been translated.



222

223 Bronze ass with dedicatory inscription in minuscule script

Provenance uncertain

Possibly 2nd century AD

H 7.1, l 6.3 cm, w 1.8 cm; 132.5 g

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1961-10-16,1 = 132932

This beautifully modelled statuette was cast using the lost-wax process (illustrated by Barnett 1963/4, 87, pl. XLIIIb; Philby 1981, 113). It carries a four-line inscription in minuscule script which is only now becoming possible to read through the discovery and publication of thousands of wooden sticks inscribed in the same script. This particular inscription has not yet been translated. Examination within the Department of Scientific Research indicates that this object was cast from a low tin-bronze with little subsequent tooling, as is evidenced by the 'flash' of metal between the forelegs; the inscription also appears to have been cast rather than added later, as similar surface dendrites are present in the deeper portions of the inscription.¹ The inscription itself has not yet been published.

¹ Unpublished report (Department of Scientific Research, The British Museum).



223

224 Inscribed bronze bull dedicated to the goddess dhāt-Ḥimyam

Provenance uncertain

1st-2nd centuries AD

H 21 cm, l 28 cm, w 9.7 cm (max.); 2,901 g

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1971-2-27,1 = 135562

The inscription reads: 'to dhāt-Ḥimyam, two bulls', indicating that this was one of a pair of bull figures to be dedicated to this god. Qualitative spectrographic analysis, undertaken by the Department of Scientific Research on a sample of metal from this object, confirms that it is a copper alloy containing the usual metallic impurities to be expected of an object of this period.¹ The bull was cast and riveted onto the double plinth base. The tail is broken but was originally in an erect position: a very similar but uninscribed tin-bronze bull is published from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and up to five others appear to have been in the Munchee collection, indicating that they must have been a very popular form of dedication (Muscarella 1988, 356-7, no. 478).



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The folds of skin around the neck and brow ridges are typical of South Arabian depictions of bulls and are also found on stone sculptures (see cat. 216).

¹ Unpublished report (R.L. File No. 3039).

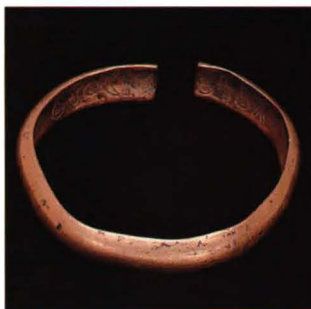
225 Inscribed gold bracelet

Provenance uncertain

External diameter 7.3–7.5 cm, w 1 cm, TH 0.35 cm;
75.3 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1977-2-26,31 = 136829

This penannular bracelet with plain terminals and concave inner section is inscribed on the inner (hidden) side with two inscriptions: 'Yt 'rdm' and 'Tnyt'. These are both personal names, the first is only attested on a calcite-alabaster head in the Berlin Museum (CIH 802) and the second is only attested in Safaitic, although the Sabaean names 'Tny' or 'Tnym' are known (Bron, pers. comm.). It is uncertain whether the inscriptions were cast or punched. The narrow diameter of the bracelet suggests that it may have been intended for a child or woman, or possibly as a dedicatory offering to a temple.



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226

226 Calcite-alabaster votive inscription to the god Aranyada'

As-Sawda'

3rd century AD

H 42 cm, w 36 cm, TH 7 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 11125

This votive inscription refers to the dedication in honour of the god Aranyada', the patron deity of Nashān, of five bronze statues representing five brothers, for favours received. The bronze statues were originally attached to the top of the inscription, but now only five sets of holes remain. Their original appearance can be reconstructed by comparison with other examples found at other sites. This dedication illustrates the continuing popularity of the cult of Aranyada' following the annexation of Nashān by Saba' in the second century BC. The symbol of Aranyada' seen on the top right-hand corner of the inscription was unknown prior to the discovery of this inscription. The inscription reads:

Ahbab, officer of the dhū-Sahar and Kibsiyān, and his brothers Amgad, Sharah, Lahay'athat and Sa'adshams, members of the dhū-Qaynatān, Nashānites, servants of the dhū-Sahar, have dedicated to their Lord Aranyada', the patron god, five bronze statuettes which his servant Ahbab had promised Him, because He has granted him what he sought from Him, and may the patron god Aranyada' keep granting his servant Ahbab, as well as Amgad, Sharah, Lahay'athat and Sa'adshams, all favour, for which

they might still ask Him. May He grant him the grace and the goodwill of their Lord Baril Arsal and Karib'athat Az'ad, members of the dhū-Sahar and Kibsi[yān], and may He stand by them against the evil and the envy and the ill-will and the baseness of all enemies, whether [known] or unknown. By Aranyada', the patron god of Nashān (Seipel ed. 1998, 97).

227 Bronze dedicatory statuettes

Wādī Markha

Figure size: H 8.2 cm, w 2.6 cm (max.)

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 330–5

A similar statuette is believed to be from Wādī Bayhān and was presented as part of a larger South Arabian collection to the British Museum in 1951 by Sir Antonin Besse and described by Barnett (1952, 48, pl. XXI: a, left = ANE 130902) as 'a crude, almost comic, little figure in native style'. The context, function and even authenticity of these flat cast figures was ambiguous, until later finds proved that they were originally attached to dedicatory inscriptions such as cat. 226 (Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 94; see also Calvet and Robin *et al.* 1997, 245–6, no. 170).



227

228 Bronze statuette of a warrior god

Provenance uncertain

Possibly 2nd–1st centuries BC

H 9.1 cm, w 2.3 cm (skirt), TH 3.5 cm; 61.2 g

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1930-6-13,7 = 122021

Presented by Mrs Gowan

This cast copper alloy statuette of a male figure in Roman military dress is probably a representation of a warrior god. The statue is probably the product of a Seleucid or later craftsman and is wearing what appears to be a three-layered pleated skirt, which is an imitation of Roman armour – the cuirass and belt over a pleated tunic. The statue may have been an imitation of a statue of the Roman god, Mars, who is usually depicted with a crested helmet. The deity is holding a patera in his right hand, and the left hand probably originally held a spear or shield.

This Roman bronze figure has many features in common with some small bronze Roman deities from Roman Britain, now at the British Museum. Eight statuettes were found in a hoard in a pot at Southbroom, Wiltshire (PEE 1811-3-8, 1–8). The Romano-British examples display a complete fusion of Graeco-Roman and native Celtic characteristics. Figures made outside Rome would display clear traces of the artistic and religious tradition of the local inhabitants. Bronze deities such as these were often found in temples and private shrines. The South Arabian and British examples share certain features: the three-layered pleated skirt and one foot slightly raised (PEE 1811-3-8, 1), the left hand holding a disc-shaped patera (PEE 1811-3-8, 8), the crested helmet and the arm position (PEE 1811-3-8, 6).

229 Ceramic bowl

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

Possibly 5th–4th centuries BC

H 4.5 cm, D 7 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 736

Miniature ceramic and calcite-alabaster vessels are often found in Sabaean temples and cemeteries and were probably used as dedications to the gods or to the deceased.



228

They may represent full-sized pottery vessels or foodstuffs. They may have been made in specialist workshops which served the temple.

230 Ceramic figurine of a camel

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

5th–4th centuries BC

H 7.5 cm, L 10 cm, w 6.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 1316

231 Ceramic figurine

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

1st–3rd centuries AD

H 7.5 cm, w 7 cm, TH 6.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 715

A well-preserved terracotta figurine in a seated position, wearing a necklace with three long plaits of hair hanging down the back. Lines have been incised into the clay to represent the toes of the feet. The figurine was found near the kitchen and craft areas between the forecourt of the Bar'ān temple and the mud-brick defensive wall.

232 Ceramic figurine of a man

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

5th century BC

H 11.5 cm, w 6.5 cm, TH 3 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 46

An unusual and quite badly damaged terracotta figurine of a man wearing a wrap-around skirt. The figure has a naked torso, revealing a well-rounded stomach. The arms would have originally bent forward and the legs were added separately before the figure was fired. On the basis of comparisons with statues found at the Awwām temple, the figurine has been dated to the fifth century BC.

233 Ceramic figurine of a woman

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Bar'ān temple

First–third century AD

H 10, w 6, TH 8 cm

The Mārib Museum, BAR 62

A terracotta figurine of a well-rounded woman wearing two necklaces and her hair in a single plait. In this case the breasts were added separately and there are straps across the feet which are perhaps meant to represent sandals. The figurine was found in the area used for the temple kitchens.

234 Calcite-alabaster relief of winged goddess with cornucopia

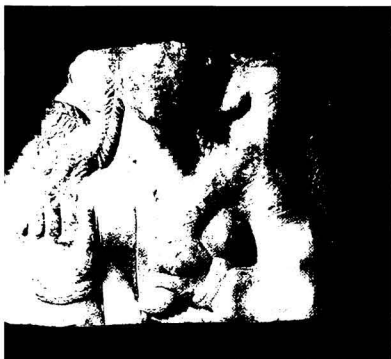
Shabwa

3rd–4th centuries AD

H 18.3 cm, w 25.5 cm, TH 6.8 cm

Private collection, UK

The British Political Officer, Mr W.H. Ingrams, discovered this relief fragment while he was exploring the ruins of Shabwa in April 1939 (Ingrams 1942, 344). Ingrams was appointed the first Resident Advisor to the Kathiri and Qu'aiti Sultans in 1937 and he and his wife, Mrs Doreen Ingrams, were the first Europeans to live in the Ḥaḍramawt. Ingrams, with the aid of Sayyid Butakr Alkaff, established the famous so-called 'Ingrams Peace' which brought security and tranquillity to the Ḥaḍramawt.



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This relief depicts the bust of a winged female holding a cornucopia with a nimbus around her head (Ryckmans 1976, 67–8, pl. 1). The front is carved half in the round and the back is roughly hewn. The relief may have been intended to be inserted in a wall. This relief is clearly influenced by Classical art. The left hand of the figure grasps the base of a cornucopia which is depicted with cross-hatch decoration. The cornucopia was originally used in Greek art to symbolise fertility and fortune but the motif spread widely during the Roman period. Around the head of the figure is a nimbus or halo which is a typical Graeco-Buddhist motif and may represent Indian influence, of which there is some evidence in South Arabian art and epigraphy, or possibly eastern Roman influence.

It is quite likely that this is a depiction of a goddess, although it is difficult to ascertain her identity. South Arabian representations of winged human beings are quite uncommon and the winged goddess Nikē may have been a source of inspiration. The figure raises her right hand which is placed in front of the armpit. The hand is portrayed in this way so that the artist could avoid having to depict the arm separately from the body, as the elbow could not be shown at the base of the relief. The figure wears bracelets on both wrists and her plaited hair hangs over her shoulders. She wears a short-sleeved tunic or dress.

Amulets and seals

Amulets were used to protect their owners from danger as well as to bring good luck. Some were worn by individuals but others were placed inside the house or depicted on, or incorporated within, architecture or funerary stelae. The shape, colour and material of an amulet were important, for instance an amulet in the form of a crescent moon or sun was believed to give their bearer the protection and power of the respective lunar or solar deities. The materials used varied widely from gold, silver or bronze to wood, stone or even broken and reused potsherds. Amulets made of gold and silver were believed to be particularly effective; gold was the colour of the sun and silver was a symbol of the moon. Inscribed amulets possessed more efficacy.

Within pre-Islamic Arabia the world was believed to be divided into two parts, the material world of the senses or human beings, and the world of spirits and the evildoers. In order to avoid and avert those forces considered to be responsible for disease and general disorder, deities were regularly invoked for their divine protection. Most of these inscriptions end with an invocation, for instance 'by 'Almaqah'. Moreover, many South Arabian inscriptions contain a colophon which was usually placed before the invocation and contains a blessing and curse formula. In this formula the owners of the inscriptions, after they had expressed their wishes to the deities, conveyed their desire for divine protection against disease or bad fortune. Religious rituals such as sacrifice or a visit to the temple were considered valid means of obtaining such protection.

Magic seems to have been practised as part of the religious ritual. The use of various cryptographic alphabets in Arabic magic and amulets in the Islamic period was widespread. An inscribed South Arabian palm-leaf stalk with such cryptographic alphabet is found in the collection of the National Museum of Šana'a'. Moreover, monograms, magical signs, circles and names of deities which have been used in South Arabia should be considered as part of the ancient Near Eastern magical traditions.

Among the objects which were credited with apotropaic and magical virtue in South Arabia was the human hand. This is found not only alongside graffiti, but also on other objects (e.g. cats 31, 221). In addition, the depiction of bull and ibex heads on funerary monuments and architecture seems to have had an apotropaic function (cat. 206). Moreover, some temple cultic vessels such as bowls, braziers and incense burners were inscribed with apotropaic formulae such as *wd'b/Wadd'ab* ('good luck'). These utensils seem to have been put to use while practising magical incantations.

South Arabian amulets may be plain or inscribed. The first category includes artefacts such as human figurines, sphinxes, mouse or serpent amulets, scarabs, depictions of the Egyptian dwarf-god Bes, beads, jewellery, eye-beads, bulls' heads, camels, dogs, antelopes, birds, monkey figures, panthers, sheep, altar-shaped amulets, plaques, symbols of deities and pendants (e.g. Seipel ed. 1998, 308, no. 206). The inscribed amulets can be divided into two functional categories:

MM

1. Protective amulets

Several kinds were employed. The most common begins with the formula *hgr* plus a deity name, meaning 'protection of a deity'. This is followed by the phrase 'be upon someone' and ends with the colophon 'against evildoer'. Another variety used the term *hwł*, 'magical power', plus a deity name and the same formula as the *hgr* amulets. A third category uses the Qatabanian formula usually added to inscriptions, namely *b'dnk 'm*, 'by your power, O 'Amm'. The term *dnn* also means 'authority, permission'. This formula is an expression for seeking the protection or refuge afforded by the god 'Amm. Some examples of the amulet of protection follow.

235 Gold necklace with semi-circular amulet of the goddess al-Lāt

Tamna', Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Tomb 1
Possibly 1st century AD

Pendant H 3.4 cm, W 4 cm, TH 0.1 cm,
chain L 11.2 cm, D 0.9 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TC 19

This exceptional piece of jewellery was discovered in 1951 in a plundered family tomb (see also cat. 270). The gold loop-in-loop chain, hollow gold beads formed from two punched hemispheres and the fine granulation attests to the high level of artistic and technical skills attained by the South Arabian goldsmiths. The granulation is used along the edges of the crescent moon-shaped pendant, around the crescent moon in its centre and in the double triangle motif on both sides of the pendant. The repoussé technique was used to form the crescent moon in the centre of the pendant. A small circular pendant shows a face, also in repoussé, and depicts a star or sun above the crescent moon. The two-line Qatabanian inscription reads:

Protection of Lāt
be upon Fāri'at

The carrier of the amulet was thus a woman called Fāri'at. MM



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236 Gold lunate amulet of the sun-goddess Shams

Shabwa

2nd-3rd centuries AD

H 1.6 cm, W 1.75 cm; 1.2 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1962-11-12.1 = 132998

Presented by Dr R. Beydoun

The term *ḥul* that is used in this inscribed amulet means 'magical power'. The verb *ḥul* means also 'to avert'. The reading and translation is as follows:

ḥul / 'lhm
'lhy / b'lt / šhrn

Magical power of the Goddess be upon the bearer of this amulet (Maraqten 1996).

The power of the goddess is thought to help the bearer of the amulet against forces of disease, etc. The word *Albatān* is the South Arabian form of Arabic al-'Ilāha and means 'the Goddess'. It represents the sun goddess. The word *b'lt* means 'bearer, owner'. The word *šhrn* denotes 'month,

moon, crescent' and it signifies here the object – the golden crescent – itself. In this case *šhrn* means 'an amulet in the form of crescent'. The Midianites not only wore such amulets but they also hung them around the necks of their camels to protect them from the evil eye. These Midianite amulets are described in the Old Testament as *šahron* (pl. *šahronīm*), 'little moon or crescent'. Arabic sources mention that the term *shams* means not only 'sun' or 'sun goddess', but also 'little sun' which was used by Arabs as an amulet.

Names of South Arabian deities appear on walls of buildings and temples. These are to be considered as amulets of protection. Thus the amulet of Shams 'the sun goddess' was depicted on walls of houses. There is also another amulet made of bronze in the form of a sickle which has a perforation for wearing it. It is inscribed on both sides and the translation of the Sabaean inscription (Ja 2208) reads 'protection of dhāt-Ḥamim'.



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Dhāt-Ḥamim' is an epithet of the sun-goddess Shams. There is also a protective amulet inscribed on a palm-leaf stalk in the collection of the National Museum of Šana'a'. It has a pendant form and the translation of the Sabaean inscription reads: 'Thanks to Shams. Protection of the wife of Tubba'.

MM

2. Amulets of Favour

The favourite amulet among the people of ancient Yemen was the *wd'b*-amulet ('good luck'). Sometimes it is also written as *wdm'bm*. Waddab-amulet means 'the god Wadd is father' or 'love is the father'. This good-luck amulet has been incised on bronze, wood, stone, silver and pendants etc. It is also found engraved alongside inscriptions, graffiti, on walls of houses, etc. It has an apotropaic function as well as being a favour amulet for the dweller of houses, and was used for good fortune and well-being in all sections of the life and afterlife, evidently by all groups of South Arabian culture since these amulets are found everywhere in south and east Arabia.

The use of the opening formula *mr*, plus the Sabaean deity name 'Almaqah, designates another type of South Arabian amulet of favour. The term *mr* in Sabaean means 'order, omen, oracle' and can thus be translated as 'omen or talisman'. Two examples are represented. The first one is a bronze pendant inscribed with a boustrophedon Old Sabaean inscription in four lines (RES 4830). It has a perforation on its side to be worn as an amulet. The four-line inscription reads:

mr / *lm*
qh / *qdm* Good omen of 'Almaqah.
wšw Success and help of Kalbat.
klbt

The carrier of the amulet was thus a woman named Kalbat.

The other amulet is also a bronze pendant with an Old Sabaean inscription engraved on it (RES 4831), made to be worn. The bearer was a man called Nasrum. The inscription reads:

mr / *lm*
qh / *qdm* Good omen of 'Almaqah.
wšw Success and help of Nasrum.
nšrm



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238



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240



241



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237 Silver amulet

Huraydah, Tomb A6

l. 2.9 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 67.209

This amulet carries a two-line inscription 'Hilm 'Awn T' (Caton-Thompson 1944, 88, pl. XLIV.14; Ryckmans 1944, 178); the same form was used for a wooden amulet carrying the magical formula 'Waddum 'Abum' (Ryckmans 1951, 35).

238 Silver amulet

Provenance uncertain

4th–3rd centuries BC

H 3.8 cm, w 2.5 cm, TH 0.05 cm; 3.6 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1915-1-9.3 = 113201

This pendant has two lines of inscription which read 'Wadd is father', and jagged-line decoration at the bottom. Wadd was the chief Minaean god.

239 Bronze amulet

Provenance uncertain

l. 3.7 cm; 31 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1925-7-24.4 = 117813

Presented by Major B.R. French

This amulet is inscribed with South Arabian characters on both sides.

240 Bronze stamp

Provenance uncertain

1st–3rd centuries AD

l. 4.3 cm, w 2.6 cm, TH 1.7 cm; 24.4 g

The British Museum, London, ANE 1993-1-26.1

Cast copper alloy property stamp, with openwork inscription of personal name, loop handle on the back. Impressions on plaster lids or bungs indicate that these were used to authenticate the contents of sealed containers (see this volume, Chapter 8).

241 Bronze stamp

Provenance uncertain

l. 2.6 cm, w 1.75 cm, TH 1.3 cm; 10.5 g

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1972-4-12.3 = 135703

Cast copper alloy property stamp, with openwork inscription of personal name, loop handle on the back.

242 Limestone seal

Acquired at Huraydah

l. 3 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.626

Death and Funerary Practices

BURKHARD VOGT

The ancient South Arabians believed in an after-life and the existence of an inner essential self.

As in many early societies, the purpose behind the arrangements made and the care and expenditure invested in the burial customs was not only the destiny of the dead but also the manifestation and preservation of the social order. This is suggested by representative funeral monuments, the preparation of the corpses for final disposal, post-funerary attendant rites, food offerings and other grave goods, as well as by written sources. Inscriptions have been found on many tombs, gravestones and accompanying grave goods: in most cases these record the name of the deceased and his or her genealogical and tribal affiliation.¹ Others report on the purchase and the construction of tombs or express a warning that, for example, the god 'Athtar will slay those who desecrate the burial. Explicit references to an underworld-like realm of the dead or a South Arabian god of death, however, are unknown.

The afterlife was also linked in a more visible manner to this life and the sphere of religious worship in particular. To benefit beyond death from divine assistance, man sometimes sought to construct his final resting place in the vicinity of temples outside the towns. The most prominent example is the temple of Awwām in the oasis of Mārib which, as the national sanctuary of the Sabaeans and the major pilgrimage centre of all southern Arabia, also became a central burial place. Further amalgamations of religious and funeral rites were manifested in the construction of mortuary chapels, such as in the cemeteries of Tamna' and Shuka', and also the design of mausolea with pillared porticoes at Mārib and Tamna' which replicated the architecture of South Arabian podium temples.

TYPES OF BURIAL

In general, graves were arranged in cemeteries located immediately outside the town walls, within abandoned intramural areas of settlements or sometimes inside

houses. Similarities in the orientation of tombs or corpses can only be distinguished on a local basis. During the first millennium BC the South Arabians inaugurated a prolific tradition of funerary architecture which varied greatly through space and time. The types of collective, multiple and single burials, the use of building materials and the furnishing of tombs were planned to reflect the status of the deceased (as well as of the bereaved), and the builders took special action to minimise looting.

The lengthiest tradition was that of collective burials which dates at least to the third millennium BC, while the latest have been recorded on the Jabal al-'Awd, where they were found in the basement of houses possibly occupied as late as the fourth or fifth century AD.² The nomadic component of first-millennium-BC society continued the use and construction of the over-ground turret tombs in particular, thousands of which were traced in the desert far away from any settlement (fig. 61). Since these align with trade routes it has been proposed that they represent people who were also in charge of the caravan trade in frankincense, aromatics and other commodities.³ Such tombs housed the remains of several individuals, who were placed side by side or one on top of the other without visible spatial borders, thus expanding the social organisation of the community of the living into the world of the dead.

Multiple burials were also common during the heyday of the South Arabian kingdoms in the first millennium BC, but are locally documented, for instance in the highlands or the port town of Qāni', as late as the fifth century AD. Among these were rock and cave tombs which were planned as clan and family crypts, whereas single burials in rock tombs are less well known. They were cut into slopes and steep escarpments, which would require the abilities of mountaineers both during construction and burial: nevertheless, they failed to escape systematic looting. The best-known examples are those in the Yarim,



FIG. 61 Turret tomb cemetery on Jabal Ruwaiq, constructed in the 3rd millennium BC. (Photo: B. Vogt)

Şana'a', Kawkaban and Mahwit highland areas. Their architecture shows a wide variation in size, design and execution, ranging from small single chambers to several rooms with rectangular, circular or oval plans. The walls, sometimes plastered with gypsum, have smaller niches for the deposition of funerary sculpture and other grave goods, or larger alcoves in which the bodies were placed in a flexed position (in other cases the bodies were simply placed on the floor). Access to the caves was provided by a door in a façade which, unlike the rock tombs of northern Arabia (such as Mada'in Saleh), bears little or no architectural ornamentation. However, more attention was paid to those which were dug into the slopes because of the rubble and other detritus as well as the need for repeated opening of tombs during successive funerals. Entrances were furnished with a dromos-like access, sometimes with ornamented ashlar masonry as at Shabwa.⁴

The cave tombs at Huraydah and Raybun give a glimpse of burial customs in Ḥaḍramawt during the first half of the first millennium BC. Tomb A5 at Huraydah contained forty-two individuals of all age groups and both sexes. The crania and long bones were grouped with mostly complete pottery vessels laid out on the floor without clear separation. It seems possible

that the bones were removed from the alcoves of the tomb after the decomposition of the soft tissue. A secondary, ossuary-like arrangement of skeletal remains is eventually suggested by a separate group of fifteen crania set in two rows without the mandibles or any grave offerings.⁵

At Raybun some cave tombs were supplemented with camel burials further downhill, which were made during the later occupation of the cave tombs.⁶ In addition, in 1983 a number of mummies were discovered in rock tombs at Shibām al-Ghirās near Şana'a' dating from the second half of the first millennium BC (fig. 62). The bodies, bearing traces of rudimentary embalming, were found in a flexed position and wrapped in a large leather bag and accompanied by a few personal grave goods (fig. 63).⁷ The custom of mummification thus may be expressive of a notion that the soul was incarnated in the body and consequently that the body was essential for a proper afterlife.

Funerary architecture reached its fullest development with the construction of multi-storeyed mausolea in the Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery outside the ancient Qatabanian capital of Tamna' and the Sabaeen necropolis of the Awwām temple in Mārib. Both cemeteries contain multiple burials; that is, a high



FIG. 62 Rock-cut tombs containing mummies at Shibām al-Ghirās, mid-1st millennium BC. (Photo: B. Vogt)

number of individuals belonging to well-defined social units buried together in one place, but in clearly separated loculi. It implies that both mausolea and cemeteries witnessed lengthy use which at Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil may have ceased with the abandonment of 'Tamna' in the second century AD, and which at Mārib lasted at least from the ninth or eighth century BC to the fourth century AD. The inventories of both cemeteries provide the most reliable reference system for the classification of South Arabian grave goods so far.

The Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery is situated on the slopes of an outcrop. The mausolea, surviving to a height of 2 to 4 m, were built of quarried schist and possessed several superimposed chambers separated by floors made from slabs. Each chamber comprised eight to ten crypts of about 2 m in length and 1 m in width arranged at regular intervals on both sides of a central corridor.⁸

The Awwām necropolis at Mārib developed into a proper and well-organised city of the dead with some 20,000–30,000 burials, an enclosure wall and a system of alleys (fig. 64).⁹ To meet the needs of an agricultural community highly dependant on the precious irrigated

fields of the oasis, most of the mausolea were designed as tomb towers which were not unlike the presumed tower houses of contemporary cities. The dead thus may have been conceptualised as residing in their tombs. Preserved to a height of almost 9 m, these tombs possessed three to four floors, of which the lowest was sometimes cut into bedrock. Up to 200 individuals, probably the commoners, were placed in such tombs. A second type, reserved for the upper echelons of Sabaean society, were monumental temple-like tombs with porticoes raised on a podium. Unique is a mausoleum with four pillars inside, most probably used as the burial place of the ruling family of Saba'. Thus the architecture of the necropolis is believed to mirror the stratification of Sabaean society.

The marginally drafted and pecked limestone ashlar masonry of the Awwām tombs was of the highest quality. They frequently carried sixth- or fifth-century-BC inscriptions which report the construction of the structures by one or several builders and mention the deceased's ancestry, tribal affiliation and sometimes rank, such as sheikhs, priests or high-ranking courtiers. The exterior of the tombs was sometimes furnished with the engraved bas-reliefs of masks of the deceased (fig. 64). Niche graves with a calcite-alabaster image and the name of the deceased (cats 277–9) and larger groups of ceramic vessels and other offerings were often found in front of the monuments.

Hypogea, combining characteristics of mausolea and cave tombs, were built into level ground or on slopes. Their circular or rectangular chambers could be reached through a shaft or a dromos-like entrance. They could receive both single or multiple burials as at the rock-cut hypogea at Kharibat al-Ahjar near Dhamār.¹⁰ A larger concentration of early first-millennium-BC hypogea was discovered at as-Sawdā' in the Jawf where the subterranean tombs were built completely from ashlar, showing a set of internal niches and furnished with a monumental gate. The tombs from Kharibat al-Ahjar date to around the turn of the Christian era, while the latest ones, attributed to the period between the second and the fifth century AD were excavated just outside Qāni', the port on the Indian Ocean coast. Here the tombs were made from basalt and their position was marked on the surface by a rectangular alignment of stones.¹¹

As in other parts of the ancient Near East, multiple burial sites were gradually replaced by a preference for individual burial. This was introduced by the third century BC and was eventually inherited and modified by the current Islamic practice. Subterranean pit interments and cists were the most common grave type spread all over South Arabia. These were usually excavated into sediments along the wādīs. From time to

FIG. 63 Wrapped mummy from Shibām al-Ghirās, mid-1st millennium BC. (Photo: S. al-Zubir)



FIG. 64 Family tombs separated by a partly excavated alley in the Awwām temple cemetery, Mārib, 6th–5th centuries BC.

(Photo: I. Gerlach)



FIG. 65 Subterranean cist graves containing mummies at Sha'ub, Šana'a', 2nd–3rd centuries AD.

(Photo: B. Vogt)

time a stone circle was laid out on the surface to identify their location. Both subtypes were stratigraphically related, for example in the Wādī Ḍura' where they have been dated to the second or third century AD. Usually, the corpses were laid in a flexed or extended position directly in the earth or in an oblong niche which was carved out along the bottom of the pit. The niche was then blocked with transversally set random stones or mudbricks or, such as in the Raybūn XVII cemetery, the pit was closed with capstones and the

shaft refilled with rubble. Generally, the furnishing of the pit and cist burials was rather poor; the rich unlooted burials from Wādī Ḍura' are certainly an exception. Some scholars hold the view that in certain areas this type of tomb represents a nomadic or perhaps the new Arabic-speaking immigrant population.¹²

The most common mode of burial during the period of the South Arabian kingdoms was the articulated burial. Some of these received additional treatment through rudimentary artificial mummification such as the use of hygroscopic plants and wrapping in cloth bandages and leather. In Yemen the removal of the viscera, well known from ancient Egypt, has not yet been directly attested except for the single stray find of a pottery lid which can be attributed to a Canopic jar. Most recently, a number of such mummies was discovered in Ḥimyarite pit and cist graves at Sha'ub near Šana'a', indicating that embalming could be afforded by the ordinary dead (fig. 65).¹³

A flexed position for bodies was customary throughout the entire first millennium BC while extended skeletons lying on the back or on the left or right side have been documented mainly after the third century BC. A fragment of a stone basin from the Awwām cemetery may be interpreted as part of a sarcophagus and wooden coffins have been recorded at the Ḥimyarite site of Jabal al-'Awd.¹⁴ Disarticulated burials have only been recorded at Huraydah Tomb A5 while the practice of cremation was postulated for only one of the tombs in Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil.¹⁵ The unlooted Grave 3 in Wādī Ḍura' and an infant burial at Sha'ub¹⁶ suggest that during the late pre-Islamic period the burials of high-ranking and ordinary persons alike included grave goods of precious metal.

GRAVE GOODS AND FUNERARY STELAE

During almost the entire first millennium BC the dead were accompanied by objects which were specifically made as funerary offerings and were required for use in the next world: these included stone sculptures ranging from statuettes, busts and portraits to reliefs and gravestones. They identified the tombs as individual resting places and helped to keep the memory of the deceased alive. Among these were anthropomorphic statuettes shown standing rigidly or seated with arms bent, perhaps in a gesture of adoration. A short inscription on the base gave the name of the deceased (or the dedicant). An archaic variant in limestone, with angular contours, has turned up from grave plundering and is said to originate mainly from the Minean graveyards of the Jawf and dated, purely on stylistic grounds, to the seventh or sixth century BC (cat. 268). It is also worth mentioning that identical pieces are at present displayed in the National

FIG. 66 Sabaeen
funerary pillar stelae
reused in the
construction of the
Awwām temple
cemetery, Mārib.
(Photo: I. Gerlach)



Museum of Asmara where they are said to come from the early layers of the Eritrean port town of Adoulis. More advanced variations of this type in alabaster, sometimes with attached personal ornaments in bronze, seem to appear by the end of the sixth or fifth century BC, as attested by a stratified find from the Bar'ān temple in Mārib.

Another widespread custom was to portray the features of men, women and children, as known from large numbers of calcite-alabaster heads especially from Mārib and 'Tamna'. They are provisionally dated to the sixth to fourth century BC. Although executed in the round, they were once fitted with gypsum into the niches of gravestones, many complete examples of which with the name of the depicted individual have recently been discovered in front of the mausolea outside the Awwām temple at Mārib (fig. 66; cats 277–8). The eyes and eyebrows were sometimes inlaid with bitumen, shell and glass, whereas the headdresses were moulded from gypsum and occasionally painted black (cats 266, 270–72).

Reported only from Qatabanian territory were plain geometric stelae (cat. 283), or gravestones with simple incised depictions of animals such as from Shuka,¹⁷ a sun and crescent motif or a human or bull's head (cat. 284). Many of these carried the name of the deceased or less frequently a short dedicatory inscription: most probably these date around the turn of the Christian era.

Also deserving of notice are two other distinctive types of gravestones, eye stelae and those with a narra-

tive content. Face plaques were introduced into South Arabia by the last centuries BC. The standardised depiction is usually reduced to a pair of eyes, occasionally complemented by nose and mouth (cat. 276). The name of the deceased, where noted, appears to be Arabic, thus reflecting the arrival of new immigrants from whom the present-day population of Yemen may have descended. Very similar items have also been found in the very north-west of the Arabian peninsula.

Gravestones with narrative scenes – either in an architectural or landscape setting or between floral designs – were illustrated with noteworthy achievements and events during life. There were also scenes showing hunting or banqueting (cats 142, 285). The influence of the Romanised Levant is evident and more directly suggested by a fourth-century-AD gravestone from Shabwa with the representation of Herakles.¹⁸ The intrusion and acceptance of beliefs and iconographic elements from the Roman sphere into South Arabian mortuary practices thus may have been stronger than suggested by the sporadic occurrence of Athena, Isis-Fortuna and other 'exotic' depictions (see cats 162–3).

Foreign influence may also find expression in a considerable number of objects from the possibly first-century-BC provincial Qatabanian graveyard of Shuka', where small plaster sculptures were unearthed, made in the shape of separate human limbs such as arms, legs and breasts.¹⁹ Except for the curious instance of a life-size bronze hand from the British Museum (cat. 221), no such objects have previously been found in

Yemen. They recall *ex votos*, for instance from Epidauros in Greece, where devotees of Asklepios, the Greek god of medicine, expressed by limb surrogates their gratitude for convalescence.

Most characteristic of multiple burials in the first-millennium-BC mausolea and cave tombs were miniature offerings, of which thousands have been collected and consisting of tiny metal, ceramic and stone vessels, incense burners, offering tables and altars (cats 287–99). Strangely, the same was also true for weaponry, which was otherwise absent from the graves of this period. Reduced to the smallest possible scale, all of these possessed 'life-size' counterparts in contemporary settlements and temples, suggesting that death was regarded only as a transformation into a different state of being but with the same needs as this life. They thus may have taken into account the limited space inside the tombs and were manufactured specifically for ritual use in the cemeteries and temples. This was particularly true also of another group of artefacts, the ostraca: neck fragments of earthenware bottles, lug handles and perforated potsherds, originally perhaps tied on the corpses, and recording the names of those buried there.

Another major category of grave goods was personal belongings, either instruments of office or representative of functions in life which may have been considered to be useful in the afterlife or taboo for the bereaved. Among these were jewellery, seals, clothes and stone, metal and ceramic vessels. The second- or third-century-AD Grave 2 in the Wādī Ḍura' demonstrates that personal valuables such as ivory artefacts, inherited luxury weapons and silver and gold tableware could also be sealed in the grave (cats 305–7). The personal belongings of the deceased may thus have presented an opportunity to advertise through tokens the wealth of the deceased and his or her former status in the community, as the composition and the number of mortuary offerings were determined by the social status of the family. Exotic commodities such as ivory, imported glassware or bronze statuettes may also indicate a more affluent dead. It is interesting to note that to a large extent this social differentiation was limited to the grave goods whereas little effort was spent on the exterior of the tombs.

Some of the burials from the later South Arabian period were accompanied by animals, preferably camels which were taken alive to the graves or a separate pit nearby where they were ritually slaughtered.²⁰ The meat of these camels was not consumed. Although the meaning and motives of such actions are unclear, the camel was perhaps regarded, as in early Islamic traditions, as the mount of its owner on the day of resurrection. This tradition, which can be

traced all around the Arabian peninsula and also in Meroitic Sudan, could have been reserved for caravan merchants and nomads. In the earlier part of the first millennium BC a similar custom was practised, when the camel was substituted by a terracotta camel figurine (cat. 114). Other important adjuncts in the death rites were food sacrifices of sheep and goat whose meat was deposited with the human burials. Death rites did not terminate with the disposal of the corpse: as portrayed on gravestones, the bereaved participated at banquets held in their presence, possibly on the occasion of their anniversaries. They were believed to propitiate the spirit of the deceased or to mitigate the malice of the god.

The epigraphic evidence indicates that during the first millennium BC South Arabia witnessed stable political conditions, first under the hegemony of the Sabaeans, later under the Qatabanians. This resulted in a kind of collective identity which was expressed by common rituals and the worship of a main god, performed jointly by all the tribes of the kingdom. The individual played a lesser role and family, kin and tribe were certainly more important as is shown by the practice of collective and multiple burials. A differentiation of individual status can barely be recognised. Consequently, the composition of funerary inventories within a multiple burial is rather uniform. Only elite groups such as the ruling families, the courtiers and the priests were treated differently.

The middle South Arabian period, however, was characterised by major political and social instabilities as well as cultural transformations. Some regions still retained old traditions while others developed new burial customs. The most prominent change in mortuary practices was, then, the introduction of single burials in a extended position. From about the turn of our era individual identity was defined through allegiance toward the ruling dynasty. For the living this ideology led to more egalitarian treatment of the individual, while in mortuary customs, and despite the diminution of grave types, status was expressed through the personal belongings of the deceased.

Almost nothing can be said about burial practices during the last centuries before the coming of Islam – a statement which coincides with the poor state of archaeological knowledge. We are faced with the difficulty of assessing to what extent an increasing regional particularism and a cultural exhaustion and attrition affected the entire sphere of death rites. Obviously, the tombs and their furnishings were more unpretentious and therefore escaped the attention of the archaeologists. The introduction of monotheistic religions and ensuing changes in traditional eschatologies may also have contributed profoundly to this development.

Grave goods

Stories of treasures buried in the ancient tombs of Yemen excited early Islamic authors and later folk legends with descriptions of the discovery of 'jewels the like of which none had seen, and ... gold and silver' (al-Hamdani 1938, 78). These reports stimulated local governors 'to send out expeditions to the tombs to secure their buried treasures, because it was customary [among the Himyarites] to entomb with the dead their riches' (al-Hamdani 1938, 91). The purpose of these expeditions was therefore to plunder the tombs so that the precious metals and gemstones could be melted or recarved. Al-Hamdani continues by describing a specific case of this whereby 'we then took away the gold ... and delivered it to the governor, who rewarded me with a hundred dinars. With it I decorated my [gold] sword' (al-Hamdani 1938, 93). Archaeological excavations of tombs and cemeteries throughout Yemen indicate similar widespread looting but also demonstrate a considerable variety in ancient burial customs, including cave tombs at Ḥurayḍah, family vaults at Mārib and Tamna', and cist graves in the Wādī Ḍura'.

The cave tombs of Ḥurayḍah

In 1936–7, in his capacity as the first British Resident Adviser to the Ḥaḍramawt, Mr Harold Ingrams helped to establish peace – 'Ingrams' Peace' – among the warring tribes of that region and thus secured the stability needed for archaeological excavation in the region. Gertrude Caton-Thompson directed excavations at the archaeological site at Ḥurayḍah (ancient Madābūm), in the Wādī 'Amd between 24 December 1937 and 3 March 1938. The three-woman British team also included the geologist Elinor Gardner, who studied the ancient irrigation and geology of the area, and the famous writer and traveller Freya Stark (1893–1993), who had returned to the Ḥaḍramawt after the publication of her initial travel account, *The Southern Gates of Arabia* in 1936 (Caton-Thompson 1944, xi–xii, 15). Stark had visited the town at Ḥurayḍah on her first visit to the Ḥaḍramawt in 1935, but was too sick to visit the nearby site itself (Stark 1936).¹ The progress of the excavations is anecdotally described in her second book on Yemen, *A Winter in Arabia* (1940), although her relations with Caton-Thompson, whom she respected yet rather feared, proved to be somewhat frosty. A temple dedicated to Sayīn, as well as an adjacent building or 'farmstead' and two cave tombs, A5 and A6, were excavated.² Caton-Thompson introduced the use of controlled archaeological excavation techniques to Yemen and was also responsible for organising the first extensive typology of South Arabian ceramics.

In 1944 Caton-Thompson's report was published in a volume entitled *The Tombs and Moon Temple at Hureidha (Hadhramaut)*.

The inhabitants of Ḥurayḍah carved their tombs into the limestone and sandstone scree-slopes of the valley cliffs nearby. Two neighbouring tombs, A5 and A6, were excavated on the northern side of the valley near the temple, of which one (A5) was undisturbed. Both tombs had been constructed by digging a short downward-sloping cut through the cemented outer layer of the scree slope, and carving a circular burial chamber out of the softer sandstone beneath. Tomb A5 contained the disarticulated remains of forty-two individuals – adults and children (both sexes). The human remains and grave offerings were distributed in eleven ill-defined groups or scatters on the floor of the tomb and a more orderly group had been arranged on a rock-cut bench on the eastern side of the tomb just inside the entrance. The tomb was interpreted as an ossuary for secondary burial because the skulls were grouped separately and the bones were disarticulated and incomplete. However, it may simply reflect repeated use and rearrangement of primary interments over many generations.

Eighty-seven almost intact vessels were found in Tomb A5, on the basis of which Caton-Thompson organised her ceramic typology. The pottery types do not change between the groups, so either the burials are virtually contemporary or (more probably) ceramic shapes and fabrics remained unchanged for up to two centuries. A bronze bracelet, beads, pendants, amulets, an inscribed seal, jewellery, stone vessels, shells and microlithic tools were also found here.

Tomb A6 was excavated 50 m west of A5 and was of a similar construction and size, the only significant difference being six niches carved into the northern and western sides of the chamber (Caton-Thompson 1944, 86, pl. LXXXI). The tomb had been robbed in antiquity. Although it was not completely excavated, the remains of three individuals were discovered, as well as pottery, shell, microliths and beads. The quality of the pottery and beads and the discovery of an agate seal with silver mount, a faience scarab, several stone vessels, a possible mirror handle, a double-sided seal made of black kaolinite, an inscribed silver amulet (cat. 237) and a purple and white variegated glass vessel, suggested that the owners of this tomb were more prosperous although Tomb A6 was thought to be contemporary with Tomb A5 (Caton-Thompson 1944, 65, 92).

¹ Stark presented a dozen Himyarite coins from this trip to the British Museum (Walker 1937); see cats 75–90.

² Initially interpreted as belonging to the moon god Sin (see this volume, Chapter 11).

243 Agate seal with silver mount

(Not illustrated)

Huraydah, Tomb A6

7th–5th centuries BC

L (stone) 1.9 cm, TH 0.5 cm, L (mount) 3.5 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge 1951.630

This single-sided seal in banded agate with a silver wire mount and a kaolinite seal (see cat. 244) were found among the relatively more valuable finds in Tomb A6 (Caton-Thompson 1944, 88, pls XLIV: 1–3, XXXVIII: 15). This seal shows a figure with both arms raised, clothed in a long, belted tunic. This may be an imitation of the apotropaic griffin demons depicted in Babylonian seals. To the right is a staff or a string of beads and to the left is a vegetal motif reminiscent of the depictions of cactus-like plants in Babylonian seals, as well as a rhomboid shape. The silver wire hook attached to the mount suggests that this seal was worn as pendant. Similar mounts were found in the Muncherjee collection. The seal was a mark of identity and they are often found in burials (Pickworth 1998a, 34). These two seals were studied by Frankfort (1944, 103), who suggested that they were evidence of contact with peripheral Achaemenid sources, dated from the mid-sixth to late fourth centuries BC, and that they may have been imported from the Gulf region (Caton-Thompson 1944, 65). These seals helped to date the tombs from between the mid-fifth and fourth centuries BC, although more recently Pickworth (1998a, 216) has given the seals a slightly earlier date of the seventh to fifth centuries BC.

244 Kaolinite seal

(Not illustrated)

Huraydah, Tomb A6

7th–5th centuries BC

L 1.6 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 1951.631

This two-sided seal was also discovered in Tomb A6 (Caton-Thompson 1944, 88, pl. XLIV: 4–8). One side depicts a kneeling hero with arms raised, threatened by two lions with their mouths open and a ball-staff between them; these motifs were used on



245–48

Old Babylonian seals in Mesopotamia (c. nineteenth century BC). The other side represents a winged figure holding two animals (possibly ibexes) upside down, which is reminiscent of the Neo-Babylonian motif of a four-winged figure holding animals by the hind legs, a motif originating in Middle Assyrian times (Pickworth 1998a, 192).

245–8 Glass, carnelian and garnet bead necklaces

Huraydah, Tombs A5, A6

7th–5th centuries BC

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge 51.634B, 636, 637, 642

Glass beads were among the most common types to be recovered in the cave tombs excavated by Caton-Thompson (see also cat. 138). The colours ranged from red, green and blue to yellow and orange, yellow and green, and black, purple and white. These are assumed to have been locally made although there is no evidence for an equivalent local manufacture of glass vessels, all excavated examples of which appear to have been imported (see cats 118, 170–74, 317). Coloured glass was probably regarded as a cheaper means of reproducing semi-precious hard stones, for which there is evidence in the

form of agate, amethyst, carnelian, felspar, garnet and granite; additional softstone beads were made of calcite, limestone and steatite (Beck 1944). Prior to the fourth century BC, beads excavated at Hajar ar-Rayḥāni were exclusively made from hard stones, including carnelian and garnet on a Mohs' scale of 7–8, which necessitated the use of fixed twin diamond splinter drills to create the perforations (Gwinnett and Gorelick 1991).¹ The greater length of time involved in producing these beads presumably ensured their greater value, perhaps explaining the final reference in the Old Testament description in the Book of Kings to the arrival of the Queen of Sheba at Solomon's court 'with a very great retinue, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones' (1 Kings 10). The Early Islamic author al-Hamdani often quotes stories about the discovery of ancient South Arabian tombs containing bodies 'heavily sown with jewels' or 'wrapped in two garments studded with jewels' (al-Hamdani 1938, 86), which appear to have been recycled after their discovery.²

¹ Additional archaeological evidence for types of South Arabian beads has been published from Hajar ibn Humayd (C. Van Beek 1969), Hajar at-Tamra (Blakely 1985, 119–20) and Shabwa (Morrison 1991).

² The reuse of ancient jewellery can be demonstrated in more recent times from Iran (Simpson 2001b).



249–51

249–51 Shell bead necklaces

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.615, 635, 641

Found scattered in Tomb A5, these shells belong to the following Indo-Pacific or Red Sea species that had presumably been collected along the ancient seashore, namely *Arca*, *Conus* (cone shell), *Nerita*, *Engina mendicaria*, *Oliva*, *Ficula*, *Trochus radiatus*, *Marginella ververiana*, *Columbella*, *Nassa obockiensis*, *Pleurotoma* and *Cypraea* (cowrie) (Jackson 1944). Holed specimens of *Oliva* were found at Hajar ibn Humayd and the Tamna' cemetery (Van Beek 1969, 320, fig. 128e; Cleveland 1965, 129–30), as were cowries at Hajar at-Tamra and *Conus* and *Engina mendicaria* at Shabwa (Blakely 1985,

119–20, fig. 42; Morrison 1991, 384–5), implying that marine shells were relatively widely traded into the Arabian interior.

252 Shell containers or scoops

(Not illustrated)

Huraydah, Tombs A5, A6

7th–5th centuries BC

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.614B,G

These shells belong to species *Cardium pseudolima* and *Arca inflata*, indigenous to the Indian Ocean. Thirty-four were found in Tombs A5 and A6 at Huraydah (Jackson 1944, 104, pl. XLI: 1). Fragmentary *Arca* and *Pecten* shells were also found in the cemetery at Tamna' (Cleveland 1965, 129). Such contexts prove that these shells had a

funerary function but what this was, or whether it was secondary, remains unclear, particularly as another example has been found in excavations of a domestic area at Shabwa (Badre 1991, 244, fig. 20: 9). Large cockle shells such as these are usually interpreted as cosmetic containers, although no traces of pigment are reported within them; alternatively, they may have been intended as other miniature containers or scoops, or had a symbolic significance.

253 Obsidian microliths

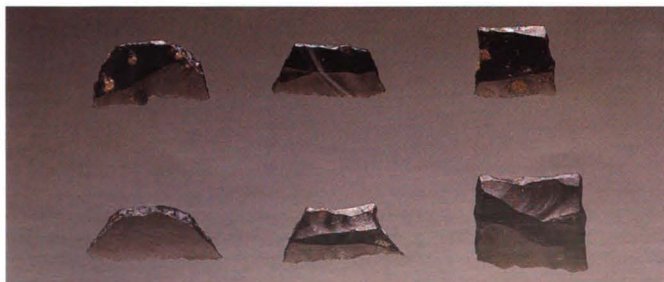
Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

l. c. 2 cm, w. c. 1 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.616 (part)

A large number of geometric obsidian microliths were found in Tombs A5 and A6, including lunates, trapezoids and rectangles (Caton-Thompson 1944, 134–6, pl. LVIII). They were struck from a prepared core, retouched on the ends and, because of their small size, presumably hafted in wood. Similar microliths have been excavated in domestic contexts at the South Arabian sites of Hajar at-Tamra and Hajar ar-Rayhāni (Rahimi 1985; 1987), as well as being found on the surface of Ghaybun, Raybūn and other Iron Age sites (e.g. Ingrams 1942, 183; Harding 1964, 29, 43, pls XXII: 13–29, XXXIV: 20–33, 75–87). As obsidian is a natural volcanic glass which occurs in the south-west Ḥaḍramawt, it is not difficult to see why this material continued to be popular throughout the first millennium BC, and, indeed, stone tools continued to be recommended in Early Islamic literature as strike-a-lights and for slaughtering tools (Miller 1984); a more unusual use was as a source of inlay (see cat. 269).



253

254 Glass vessel

Huraydah, Tomb A6

7th–5th centuries BC

h. c. 5 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.613

This is a wire-drawn glass vessel with swirls of white and purple glass, which was probably imported from the Mediterranean (Caton-Thompson 1944, 87, pls XLIV: 15, LVII: 10). Although part of a small green



254

and white trailed glass vessel was excavated in a c. sixth- to fifth-century-BC domestic context in Level J at Hajar ibn Humayd (Van Beek 1969, 285–6, fig. 125a, pl. 51b–c), glassware appears to have been relatively scarce in Yemen until the centuries AD when larger quantities were imported from the Roman and Persian Empires (see cats 118, 170–74, 317). Glass production within Yemen itself probably only began during the medieval period, from which time there is evidence for several extensive factories along the coast near Aden (Whitcomb 1988).



255

255 Miniature limestone cup

Huraydah, Tomb A6

7th–5th centuries BC

H 6.1 cm, D (rim) 3.7 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, 51.581

This miniature cup carved from coarse crystalline limestone is incised with irregularly spaced shallow vertical lines. The cup has an irregular thickness and is only 2.5 cm deep; the pedestal is conical and slightly hollowed underneath (Caton-Thompson 1944, 87, 133, pls XXXVII: 4, LVII: 8).

Tomb Pottery

The pots are so depressingly ugly that a prolonged contemplation of them would make anyone ill. (Stark 1940, 183)

Caton-Thompson organised the total of ninety-three handmade vessels found in Tombs A5 and A6 into fifteen principal forms, I–XV. Three fabric groups were distinguished, each of which was fairly form-specific although there were some exceptions. The first two fabric groups consisted of a coarse, porous, pink-buff ware which was used for water coolers and storage jars, and a less coarse, red-slipped ware used for drinking cups and bowls. These fabrics contained greater and lesser amounts of quartz, shale and chaff temper. The surface of the first fabric type usually had no slip or wash whereas the surface of the second variety was treated with a red haematite slip coating. With regard to the origin of the first two ceramic fabrics, Caton-Thompson's suggestion that they were probably local has been confirmed by recent petrographic analysis.

The third fabric was a black ware, which Caton-Thompson called 'stone ware' and was tempered with tremolite-chlorite-talc-schist. The third fabric type was reportedly used for Caton-Thompson's 'ear-lug' bowl and so-called 'unguent' vessels and other miniature vessels, although this tempering technique was used in other forms as well. Caton-Thompson noticed a greasy feeling on the surface of the 'stone ware' vessels and concluded that they were 'all designed probably to contain fatty substances'. However, this greasy feel is not due to a fatty residue; it reflects the texture of the talc (a major component in soapstone or steatite) that was used to temper the vessels (see black 'stone ware', cat. 262).



256

256 Pedestal bowl with inscribed ledge rim

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 20 cm, D 15 cm (outer max.)

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, 51.589

This vessel was found in Tomb A5 with a group of grave offerings on a bench just inside the entrance of the tomb (A5 group VI). These vessels usually had inscriptions on the rim which were incised before firing. This particular example reads, 'Waddum Abum - Mass-Samsum - Hawl 'Ab', which may represent a magic formula (Ryckmans 1944, 178). This is a typical example of Caton-Thompson's (1944, 76, pls XXVIII: 2, XXIX: I, LI: 5) pottery Type II: pedestal bowls with ledge rims.



257-60

257 Shallow pedestal bowl

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 8 cm, D 15 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.597

This shallow open pedestal bowl was also found in the group of offerings on the bench in Tomb A5 (A5 group VI). This bowl is typical of Caton-Thompson's pottery Type V which usually has an unburnished red slip inside and out and a plain rim (Caton-Thompson 1944, 76, pls XXXI: 3, LII: 12).

258 Pedestal bowl

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H c. 15 cm, D 10 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.591

This red slip pedestal bowl was found just inside the entrance of Tomb A5 in a group with three crania, three other pots including an 'ear-lug' bowl (A5.IX.2), a bronze bangle, beads, bronze tacks, perforated shells and microliths (A5.IX) (Caton-Thompson 1944, 78, pls XXX: 4, LII: 11). The bowl has two horizontal incised lines around the rim, the upper one relatively straight and the lower one wavy. It is typical of Caton-Thompson's pottery Type III, including pedestal bowls and cups, which often have unburnished red slip inside and out and incised lines around the rim.

259 Goblet on tall stem

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 30 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.586

This is an example of Caton-Thompson's Type I goblets on tall stems which she likened to water-coolers used in Yemen today (Caton-Thompson 1944, 72, 117, pls XXVII: 3, XLIX: 2). The rim of the vessel is decorated with a wavy-line decoration. It was found with a closely grouped assemblage of sixteen objects at the entrance of the tomb (A5, group I) including a 'black stone ware' cup (A5.I.7, see cat. 261).

260 Shallow bowl

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 10 cm, D 15 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.596

This shallow open bowl with a rounded base is typical of Caton-Thompson's pottery Type VI (Caton-Thompson 1944, 75, 121, pls XXXI: 5, LIV: 1). This bowl has an incised line along the top and is inscribed with a single South Arabian letter. The vessel was found on the floor of the tomb in a group of objects to the west of the entrance (A5.V).

261 Black 'stone ware' cup

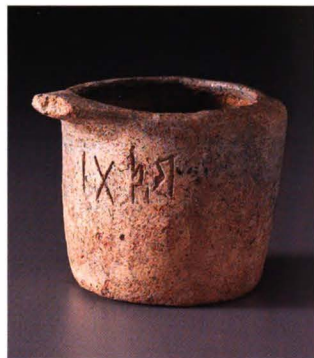
Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 10 cm, D 8 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.605

This 'stone ware' cup with a missing spout has a four-letter numerical inscription, which could indicate the value of contents, the capacity, or a sequential number. This vessel is an example of Caton-Thompson's pottery Type X (Caton-Thompson 1944, 72,



261

124–7, pls XXXIV: 3 and 4, LV: 5). The 'stone ware', Caton-Thompson's third fabric type, was used to manufacture the so-called 'unguent' vessels (of which this is an example) and the hemispherical 'ear-lug' bowls (Type IX), as well as other miniature cups, bowls and lids. Rather than having contained a fatty substance, as Caton-Thompson claimed, it is now clear that the greasy texture of these vessels is due to the talc-rich rock (steatite) which was added to the clay.

262 Black 'stone ware' bowl

Huraydah, Tomb A5

7th–5th centuries BC

H 8.5 cm, D 15.5 cm

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology,
Cambridge, 51.600

This black 'stone ware' bowl is an example of Caton-Thompson's pottery Type IX, with four ear lugs and a South Arabian character on each lug. This type of bowl was most probably used as a cooking pot, as steatite

temper is known to improve the thermodynamic and insulating properties of pottery. Steatite temper was also used in hemispherical bowls at Hajar ar-Rayhāni and Hajar ibn Ḥumayd. The pottery from these two sites was compared and although the mineralogy of the temper is similar, the raw materials were derived from different sources (Blakely and Glanzman 1996, 13–14). Caton-Thompson thought that the bowls, or at least the steatite rocks, were almost certainly not local as there was no geological formation to supply the rock in the area around Ḥuraydah; the nearest source was found a few days' camel journey to the south or south-west of the site (Caton-Thompson 1944, 77–8, 123–4, pls XXXII: 3 and 7, LIV: 10). Although Caton-Thompson indicated that one possible source may have been the Wādī Bayhān, petrographic analysis has shown that the black 'stone ware' bowls from Ḥuraydah are mineralogically different from the steatite-tempered vessels from Hajar ibn Ḥumayd. Caton-Thompson suggested these 'ear-lug' bowls were imitations of stone vessels but Blakely and Glanzman (1996) have shown that at Hajar ar-Rayhāni the situation was quite the reverse and that the schist-tempered pottery was actually the precursor to the stone vessels.



262

Funerary sculptures

Within southern Arabia there was a well-developed ancient tradition of carving funerary sculptures from a fine-grained translucent yellowish stone which resembles alabaster. Garbini (1974, 296) has proposed that this was known as *muglm* and the *Periplus* refers to the export of alabaster from the Red Sea port of Mouza (Antonini 2001, 26–7).¹ However, analyses of approximately 400 South Arabian stone objects in the Department of Scientific Research at the British Museum revealed that none were actually made of true alabaster but most were made from varieties of calcite; further identified stones included marble and pyrophyllite whereas other sculptures and monumental inscriptions were carved from softer types of limestone.² The exceptional discovery in the Jawf region of a wooden sculpture carved in a similar style raises the possibility that many more sculptures were carved in wood, but they have not survived. The eyes and eyebrows of the stone sculptures were usually inlaid or highlighted with red or black pigment although, surprisingly, there does not seem to be any evidence for more extensive colouring of the sculptures to indicate details of dress or jewellery. Metal earrings and necklaces were occasionally attached to the female figures and plaster was sometimes added to indicate the hair or, more commonly, to attach carved stone heads into the window-like recesses cut into stelae. The exact dating of many of these sculptures is uncertain, but they appear to have a longer date-range than previously believed.

¹ See this volume, Chapter 3; Doe (1971, pl. 37) implies that this stone was imported.

² Unpublished report (R.L. Project 6945).

263 Calcite-alabaster funerary stela of Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at, King of Awsān

Wādī Markha

1st century AD

H 41 cm, W 21 cm, TH 6.5 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 601

This is the funerary stela of Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at, King of Awsān. The inscription reads:

Funerary monument of Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at, son of [the god] Wadd, King of Awsān; let it remain in this place for all time to come. It is not permitted for any of the future kings of Awsān to remove it from its place in favour of some [other] monument which replaces it: as his father Wadd commanded in His oracle.

In this inscription Yasuduq'il Far' Sharah'at claims to be the son of Wadd and thus is the only South Arabian ruler to claim



263

descendancy from a god (Seipel ed. 1998, 384). It appears to have been found at the site of the royal cemetery of Awsān at Khazinet ed-Darb in the Wādī Markha (see also cats 34–6).



264

**264 Calcite-alabaster statue
of a standing male figure**

Provenance uncertain

Possibly 3rd–1st centuries BC

H 16 cm, W 18 cm, D 8 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1907-1-12.5 = 102461

**265 Limestone funerary stela
with the head of a bearded man**

Provenance uncertain

Possibly 2nd century BC

H 34 cm, W 16 cm, TH 9 cm

The National Museum, Aden, NAM 1344

This stela from the Muncherjee collection lacks an inscription and is difficult to date precisely, but the style of the neatly trimmed beard framing the face is a feature found on other South Arabian funerary busts (e.g. Pirenne 1986, vol. II, 423–5; also ex-Muncherjee collection). The empty eye sockets were originally inlaid with another material, since removed; unusually, a sliver of shell was used to indicate the position of the mouth (Seipel ed. 1998, 293–4; Antonini 2001, 116).



265



266

266 Calcite-alabaster head of a man

Tamna'

Possibly 3rd–2nd centuries BC

H c. 18 cm, w c. 13.5 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1986-10-4,2 = 140658

Presented by Sir Charles Johnston

The beard is indicated with a row of short incised lines; the eyes are represented by shell inlays, originally set with coloured stone to show the pupils. Another missing inlay below the lower lip represents a stud. The top, back and sides of the head were left unfinished as the head may originally have been set into a niche.

267 Calcite-alabaster funerary stela of a bearded man

Khawlān

3rd–2nd centuries BC

H 30 cm, w 12 cm, TH 12 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a', YM 9054

This stela depicts a bearded male; the eyes were originally probably inlaid with shell but these are missing, as is the inlay originally set immediately below the mouth. The inscription on the base gives a personal name 'Khayrumū of the tribe Udwan' (Seipel ed. 1998, 366–7, no. 402).



267

268 Limestone statuette of a seated figure

Possibly from the Jawf

Possibly 6th–3rd centuries BC

H 20.5 cm, w 9.8 cm at arm, D at arm 9.8 cm (max.)

The British Museum, London,

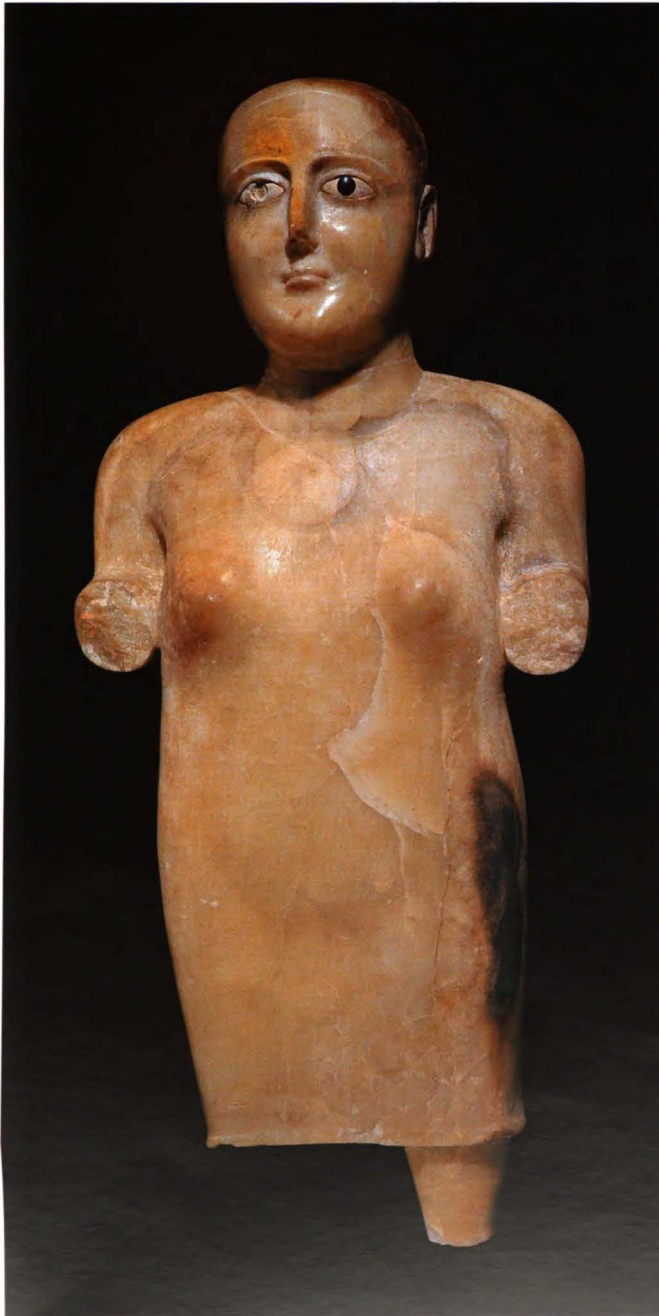
ANE 1924-12-9,4 = 116677

Presented by Lieutenant-Commander C. Crawford

This statue has shell inlaid eyes and a face highlighted in antiquity with deliberately applied reddish-brown pigment, presumably deriving from an iron-rich substance: this feature has also been observed on a number of other South Arabian sculptured heads (Fakhry 1952, vol. I, 122). The figure is inscribed on the base with the name of the dedicant 'Sirnām' (Antonini 2001, 54, pl. 16). Stylised limestone figures of this type, either of men or women, are most characteristic of the Jawf region (e.g. see Seipel ed. 1998, 364–5, nos 395–7, 399).



268



269 Calcite-alabaster statue of a standing female figure

Mārib

Possibly 3rd–1st centuries BC

H 68.5 cm, W 33 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1966-7-25,1 = 134848

This is one of the largest surviving free-standing sculptures of a female figure to have been discovered in southern Arabia. The woman is wearing a long plain dress. The bald appearance of the head is misleading as the hair was originally rendered in another material; small holes piercing the lips presumably indicate the position of metal studs, which were subsequently removed. The ears are also pierced to take earrings. The eyes are inlaid with shell, of which a polished obsidian pupil survives intact in one (Doe 1967, pl. 25; Antonini 2001, 78, pl. 29). Obsidian is a volcanic glass which occurs in Yemen and was also utilised here for making sharp microlithic tools (see cat. 253). Lapis, ivory, onyx and other semi-precious stones set on a clay fill were used on other sculptures (Doe 1967, 7), whereas inlays indicating the eyebrows or beards were often fixed into rows of closely set drill holes. A final feature to note on this statue is the natural veining on the upper chest which has been left by the sculptor to coincidentally resemble the position and shape of a necklace.

270 Calcite-alabaster female head with inlaid eyes

Tamna', Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Tomb 10

Possibly 1st century BC–1st century AD

H 36.5 cm, W 18 cm, TH 17.2 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TC × 21

Christened 'Miriam' by Arab workmen at the time of its discovery, this particularly fine head was found during Honeyman's first season of excavations for the American Foundation for the Study of Man at the Tamna' cemetery in 1951. The eyes are inlaid with a blue material which is usually assumed to be lapis lazuli although there is now evidence that blue glass was employed on other sculptures (see cat. 271). The braided hair has been rendered in plaster and was originally painted black; the same hairstyle was directly carved on some other statues and is also to be seen on an exceptional wooden sculpture of a woman from al-Bayda' in the Jawf (Ṣana'a' National Museum). The holes



270

on either side of the neck originally supported a necklace although there is no evidence to prove that the inscribed gold amulet which was found nearby (cat. 235) belonged to this sculpture as is sometimes suggested (Phillips 1955, 110, 113, pl. 15; von Gladiss 1979, 156, fig. 30: 1; Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 171, 234; Seipel ed. 1998, 349, 351).

271 Calcite-alabaster male head with blue glass eye-liner

Possibly 1st century BC–1st century AD

H 23.5 cm, w 20cm, TH 12.2 cm

The British Museum, London, ANE 2002-1-14.2

Presented by Jonathan Hassell

This exceptional sculpture is carved from a fine calcite-alabaster; the hair on the top of the head has been roughly chiselled and the rounded face is dominated by a long prominent nose. The eye sockets were inlaid with shell and presumably stone for the pupils, and highlighted with a vivid blue eye-liner. The latter material has been specially analysed within the Department of Scientific Research and proven to be cobalt-coloured glass rather than lapis lazuli (see cat. 270).¹

¹ Unpublished report (R.L. File No. 7249); Simpson 2002.



271



272

272 Calcite-alabaster funerary head set in plaster

Possibly 1st century BC–1st century AD

H 20 cm, W 14.3 cm, TH 7 cm

The British Museum, London, ANE 2002-1-14.3

Presented by Jonathan Hassell

The face may represent a woman; the eye sockets were originally set with inlays which have been subsequently removed. The use of plaster to indicate the ears and hair, on which area there are traces of black pigment, was probably more common than this exceptional piece suggests, but owing to the fragility of the plaster this feature does not usually survive intact (see also cat. 270).

274 Ceramic face plaque

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B

6th–5th centuries BC

H 4.5 cm, L 14.1 cm, W 9.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 B 493



273

273 Calcite-alabaster head with inscribed base

Tamna', Hayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Area B, locus 13-1

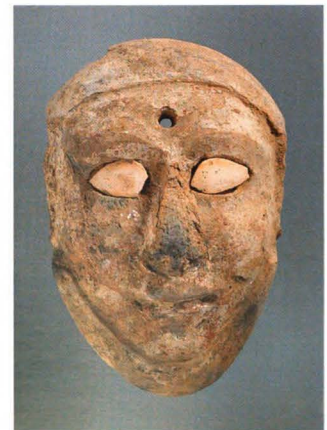
First half of 1st century AD

Calcite-alabaster and limestone,

H 21 cm, W 10 cm, TH 10 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TC 1884

This tall-necked head is set with plaster into a separate stepped base inscribed with the personal name 'Sabahat of the tribe Gharb'. The eyes were originally inlaid with shell, although one is now missing; the pupils were separately inlaid.



274



275

275 Ceramic face plaque

Possibly from Qatabān

Possibly 6th–5th centuries BC

H 15 cm, W 10.7 cm, TH 5 cm

The British Museum, London,
ANE 1966-12-15.1 = 134891

This is an organic-tempered fired clay funerary plaque of a bearded man with some traces of pigment and a burnished surface. Painted and plain ceramic plaques of this general type exist in the Ṣana'ā' National Museum (Costa 1978, 38, pl. XVIII, no. 72; Seipel ed. 1998, 348–9, no. 336), including one example set in plaster, suggesting that these were originally fixed in niches within a funerary context and thus may have constituted smaller, cheaper versions of the stone heads found at Mārib.

276 Limestone face stela

Tamna', Hayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery

First half of 1st century AD

H 14.9 cm, W 21 cm, TH 7 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man,
TC 40

Face stelae are usually depictions of the eyes and mouth of the deceased but some renditions are so stylised that they simply consist of two U-shaped eye outlines separated by a line representing the nose (e.g. Harding 1964, 48, pl. XLIII: 26; Cleveland 1965, 19, pls 39–40). This stela possesses a raised border with traces of red pigment; there are also traces of a black adhesive in the eye sockets and remains of red and black pigment in the eyebrows and eye sockets, which would indicate that at least some of these face stelae – which are characteristic of the Tamna' cemetery – were originally enhanced with colour (Seipel ed. 1998, 354, 367–9, nos 351, 413).



276



277



278

277 Funerary stela

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

6th–4th centuries BC or later

Limestone, calcite-alabaster and gypsum,

H 102 cm, W 24 cm, TH 18 cm

The Mārib Museum, 98 A 2344

Over 600 of these funerary stelae had already been discovered at Mārib and were stored in the old fortress by the time of the first excavations at the site by the American Foundation for the Study of Man in 1951 (Phillips 1955, 202, pl. opposite p. 224). Other examples have since been discovered during excavations of the Awwām temple cemetery. They prove that the finely carved yet anonymous calcite-alabaster heads which exist in a large number of collections were originally set within inscribed stelae such as this (see p. 184; fig. 66).



279

278 Funerary stela

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A, Tomb 1

6th–4th centuries BC or later

Calcite-alabaster, limestone and gypsum,

H 93 cm, W 24.5 (top) cm, W 24 cm (bottom)

The Mārib Museum, 98 A 2345

279 Limestone funerary pillar stela

Probably from Mārib

H 63 cm, W 24 cm

The British Museum, London, ANE 1985-2-23,109

A limestone rectangular funerary stela; this depicts a head carved in low relief, with an inscription above it giving the fragmentary personal name "... son of Mgdm' (Bron, pers. comm.).



280

280 Limestone funerary pillar stela

Possibly from the Jawf

H 38 cm, W 19 cm, TH 8 cm

The National Museum, Şana'a, YM 1121

This belongs to a type of very stylised funerary stelae simply carved from single blocks of limestone rather than being set with separate calcite-alabaster heads. This group is not limited to the Jawf as other varieties of pillar stelae are also attested from Mārib (e.g. cat. 279). This example is inscribed with a personal name probably belonging to the dedicant, 'Aziz' (Seipel ed. 1998, 367–8, no. 412).

281 Calcite-alabaster stela of a woman wearing bracelets

Tamna', Hayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Area B, Room 1

3rd century BC–mid-1st century AD

H 24.3 cm, W 16.5 cm, TH 7 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, TC 1557

The inscription reads 'Gābi' [of the family of] Hani'mat' (Seipel ed. 1998, 353, cat. 348).



281



282



283

282 Calcite-alabaster stela

Possibly Tamna'

1st century BC

H 30 cm, w 19.01 cm, TH (at base) 7 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1951-2-12.1 = 130880

This calcite-alabaster stela is a beautiful example of a particular style of South Arabian dedication which depicts the bust of a female in high relief against a rectangular plaque, with an inscription on the base presumably naming the deceased (or perhaps the dedicant). The figure is shown in a characteristic pose, with a raised right hand and the left hand holding a stylised sheaf of wheat, a symbol of fertility. In similar examples the right hand covers the left hand, which holds the wheat, and others show the dedicant holding a bird in the left hand. The holes at ear level were for attaching jewellery. The figure wears bracelets on each wrist and is depicted in a short-sleeved tunic, but the neckline is not gathered, nor does she wear the elaborate necklace depicted on some other stelae (Cleveland 1965, 22, pl. 41; Seipel ed. 1998, 333–5, no. 273). The statue finishes at the hairline and top of the head and the hair is not depicted, possibly because these details were rendered in plaster (see cats 270, 272). The inscription on the base of this example reads: 'Aban of the tribe of Mahdhar'.

Pirenne (1960) suggested that on the basis of the epigraphy the stela should be dated to the first century BC, independently supported by Cleveland (1965, 22) who suggested that it came from the cemetery at Tamna'.

283 Calcite-alabaster funerary stela

Tamna', Hayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Area B, locus 4-2

First half of 1st century AD

H 27.5 cm, w 13.5 cm, TH 6 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, TC 2183

This belongs to a type of highly stylised stelae resembling obelisks and carved with a stepped base inscribed in this case with the name of the dedicant, 'Sukaynat [of the tribe] Gharb' (Seipel ed. 1998, 355, no. 354).

284 Calcite-alabaster stela with bull's head

Tamna', Hayd ibn 'Aqil cemetery, Room 1, part of 'alabaster treasure' from Area B

First half of 1st century AD

H 29 cm, w 10.2 cm, TH 7.9 cm

The American Foundation for the Study of Man, TC 1519

This stela was found *in situ* as part of a hoard of fourteen calcite-alabaster objects. The stela is characteristically rectangular in shape with a concave upper edge which refers to the crescent moon motif, widely distributed in southern Arabian art. The wrinkles around the muzzle and eyes of the bull are especially emphasised. Bull motifs of all kind are frequently attested in the funerary art of the cemetery of Hayd ibn 'Aqil. The carefully incised inscription reads: 'Thawb'il [from the tribe of] Yan'im'. The faint horizontal lines were used by the stone mason as a guide when cutting the letters.

285 Calcite-alabaster stela with camel riders, sword and inscription

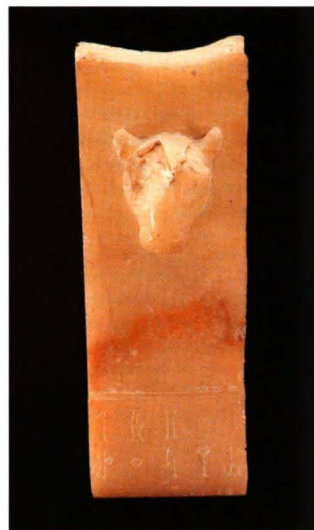
Provenance uncertain

H 25 cm, w 26 cm, TH 6 cm

The British Museum, London,

ANE 1908-4-14.2 = 102601

This stela depicts a camel and two riders, one with a sword, with a two-line inscription which reads 'portrait and monument of



284



285

Ha'an, son of Dhū-Zu'd'. Two funerary stelae in the Musée du Louvre also show cameleers; one is seated on a saddle placed across the hump, with a waterskin slung next to the left rear flank (see also cat. 110), and is guiding the camel with a halter and stick, whereas the other depicts a horseman using the tip of his spear to guide a camel in front of him (Calvet and Robin *et al.* 1997, 107–10, nos 18, 20). The latter scene belongs to a genre attested on murals at Qaryat al-Fau (in south-west Saudi Arabia) and north Arabian rock graffiti celebrating successful camel raiding (Macdonald 1990).

286 Limestone funerary stela

Barāqish area

Possibly 1st century BC

H 15.5 cm, w 16.5 cm, TH 7 cm

The National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 605

The front of this slab is carved with a bilingual inscription beginning with a two-line Latin inscription at the top which reads:

[P] CORNE[LIUS]

EQUES [N? or M?]

This is followed by a one-line inscription in Greek which confirms that the man's first name was Publius. The title indicates that he may have been a cavalryman possibly serving within an auxiliary unit, in which case he may have participated in the Roman expedition led by Aelius Gallus in 26/25 BC (Bowersock 1983, 148–53; Shahid 1984, 72–3; Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 69). However, it is uncertain whether it is a funerary stela or whether it could represent a dedicatory inscription by a merchant who had the rank of *eques* and for which a date as late as the fourth century AD has been suggested (Costa 1977; 1986).



286

287 Miniature calcite-alabaster chalice

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 4.1 cm, D 2.8 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 1723

Carved in the form of a straight-sided bowl supported on a decorative flared base.

288 Miniature stone bowl

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 4.9 cm, D 6.5 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2393

Carved in imitation of a hole-mouth container equipped with vertical perforated lugs through which cord was passed to secure a cloth or leather lid.

289 Miniature calcite-alabaster bowl

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 2.6 cm, D 2.2 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2022

Carved in the form of a small vessel with a low foot, the sides crudely decorated with vertical incised lines.

290 Miniature calcite-alabaster bowl

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 2 cm, D 2.4 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 B 92

291 Miniature calcite-alabaster chalice

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 5.3 cm, D 3.3 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2380

The decoration on this vessel resembles that on cats 287, 289 but the container is supported by a more elaborate flared base.

292 Miniature stone altar

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

6th–4th centuries BC

H 3 cm, W 6 cm, TH 5.6 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 1948

293 Calcite-alabaster compartmented vessel

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B

4th–2nd centuries BC

H 1.2 cm, W 3.7 cm, TH 1.7 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 B 370

The compartments may have been intended for different substances.

294 Miniature calcite-alabaster libation table

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B

5th–3rd centuries BC

H 2.2 cm, L 8.7 cm, W 6.8 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 B 19

This is carved with four short legs and decorated on the front with a row of four ibex heads.



287–91



292-3



294-5



297-99

295 Miniature limestone libation table

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B

6th–4th centuries BC

H 1.5 cm, L 6.4 cm, W 4.8 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 97 A 763

The front of this object is decorated with a bull's head. On larger examples a channel was used to drain away liquid offerings.

296 Calcite-alabaster statuette of a bull

(Not illustrated)

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B, Grave 10

6th–5th centuries BC

H 4 cm, L 4.7 cm, W 2.2 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 B 392

This highly stylised miniature sculpture of a bull was probably made specially for burial as an unscripted dedicatory offering to the god 'Almaqah.

297 Miniature bronze bowl with stand

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A, Grave 2

5th–3rd centuries BC

H 5.4 cm, D 3 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2096

The form of the stand of this votive object imitates a piece of folding wooden furniture; furniture is also depicted on contemporary sculptures (see cats 99, 142).

298 Miniature bronze incense burner

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A, Grave 2

5th–3rd centuries BC

H 1.7 cm, D 3.6 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2095

This small footed container was probably made in imitation of an incense burner.

299 Miniature bronze bucket with a high loop handle

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A

4th–3rd centuries BC

H 3.2 cm, D 2.7 cm

The Mārib Museum, AW 97 A 1210

Larger buckets or pails presumably had swinging hinged handles but due to the small size of this model version, it was cast in one piece.

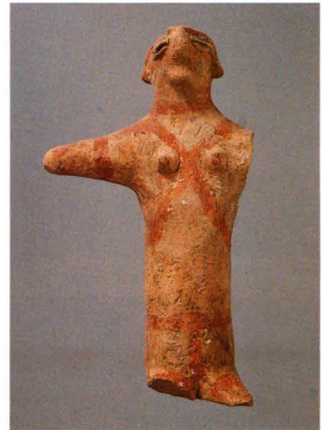
300 Glazed composition Ushabti figure

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area B, Grave 2
Possibly mid-1st millennium BC
H 2.7 cm, w 1.2 cm, TH 0.8 cm
The Mārib Museum, AW 98 A 2243

This small object was probably imported from the Levant where there was a flourishing production of these Egyptianising tomb models. The glaze has badly decayed but was originally probably a bright bluish-green.



300



302

301 Bronze ibex statuette

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A, Grave 1
5th century BC
H 7.5 cm, w 5 cm, TH 2 cm
The Mārib Museum, AW 97 A 1222

Cast on a clay core with a miniature handle on the bottom, the style of this miniature grave offering resembles that of contemporary bronze incense burners decorated on the front with similar standing ibex figures (see cat. 104).



301

302 Painted ceramic figurine of a female dedicant

Mārib, Awwām cemetery, Area A
7th–4th centuries BC
H 12.9 cm, w 7.5 cm, TH 3 cm
The Mārib Museum, AW 97 A 69

Modelled from clay, painted with a slightly fugitive reddish brown pigment and fired, this stylised figure of a woman with outstretched arms (of which one is broken) is not a child's toy, but was probably intended to represent a worshipper or mourner.



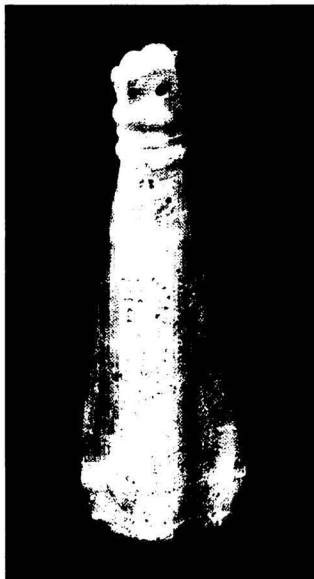
303

303 Calcite-alabaster platter

Shabwa, Grave complex IX
1st–2nd centuries AD
D 21 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 120

This is carved in the form of a shallow container with a broad flat rim and supported on a tall flared base. This form is quite likely influenced by metalwork.

Wādī Ḍura'



304

304 Inscribed
calcite-alabaster pestle (?)

Tarim

Possibly 1st century AD

H 14.2 cm, D (base) 4.9 cm

Private collection, UK

The two-word drill-dotted inscription on the side of this banded calcite-alabaster object reads 'Y'r', a personal name known only in Qatabanian, which may indicate its provenance, and 'lsrh', a personal name attested in the four South Arabian dialects (Bron, pers. comm.). The object was acquired in Yemen by Mr W.H. Ingrams (see cat. 234). A similar but uninscribed object measuring 6.5 cm in height was excavated in the cemetery of Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil at Tamna' (Cleveland 1965, 43, pl. 68); although there is little evidence for use/wear on the end of this object which would prove its use as a pestle, the alternative-published interpretations of the Tamna' object as a chess-piece or stopper are clearly incorrect (Seipel ed. 1998, 357–8, no. 360). The highly stylised bull's head which is found on the top of both of these objects recurs in the form of vestigial handles on contemporary 'beehive'-shaped vessels (Hassell 1997; see cat. 175).

In 1984 farmers made a chance discovery of a number of graves containing silver, bronze and gold artefacts, while working near the Wādī Hunayka in the Wādī Ḍura' region of Shabwa province. A joint French–Yemeni archaeological team conducted rescue excavations at the site, north of the ancient settlement of Hajar adh-Dhaybiyya, and in an area of 5×3 m discovered four graves belonging to a much larger cemetery which covered a total area of more than 100 m. Grave 1 was badly looted and was delineated with small stone blocks. Graves 2 and 3 were simple trenches with traces of a clay lining, and the fourth grave was a trench covered with a stone slab (Breton 1993, 85–6). These graves were unlike anything discovered at Ḥuraydah, Tamna', Mārib or Shabwa and were exceptional not only for the archaeological information they offered on burial customs in pre-Islamic South Arabia but also for the incredible quality and quantity of the objects that were found inside.

Grave 3 was intact. A single male skeleton was found inside with the head positioned to the west and twenty-seven objects placed on either side of the body and at the feet. On the hands of the skeleton were two gold rings, a ring with a carnelian setting and another decorated with a monogram which reads 'Yafa' dhū-Taraf' (cat. 308), a name which presumably refers to the occupant. The number of weapons and precious objects in the grave suggest that Yafa' dhū-Taraf was a high-ranking warrior or leader: an axe, spear, and long iron rod were found placed to the left of the body. To the right of the body lay a single-edged sword with a silver hilt decorated with gold and inscribed with the same monogram as the ring, but in this case with a pair of hands above the inscription. The sword was sheathed although only the silver framework of this remained; it was also inscribed with a monogram, 'Wahab' (cat. 312). A bronze basin (cat. 313) and parts of a belt were also found to the right of the body. The remains of the belt included two inscribed silver buckles each bearing the name 'Hawfi'athat dhū-Ratab', as well as thirty-six rivets and thirty-nine decorated silver buttons (cat. 311).

At the foot of the body were three knives with ivory handles, three ivory plaques, a bronze ladle decorated with the head of a ram, a bronze vessel with two ring handles (cat. 315), a decorated glass vase, a jar, a pot, a millefiori glass bowl (cat. 317), a cylindrical glass bottle, a bronze incense burner (cat. 316) and a lidded bronze incense burner with a handle decorated with a ram (cat. 314). Three important objects in gilded silver with dedications referring to the Taraf family were found in and around the grave including a decorated silver bowl (cat. 306), a ladle (cat. 305) and container (cat. 307).

The dating of the cemetery and the grave goods is a difficult task on the basis of only four graves. The stratigraphic position of the graves and the variation in building techniques suggest that the cemetery was used over several centuries. On the basis of foreign parallels and the palaeography of the inscriptions, the objects in Grave 3 have been dated to between the 1st and 4th centuries AD, which suggests that the Taraf family accumulated the objects over a number of generations. Furthermore, not only do the objects in Grave 3 date to different periods but they also suggest contact with a variety of places. Roman influence is particularly strong in the bronze vessels (cat. 313) and locally adapted Graeco-Roman motifs are used in the silver bowl (cat. 306) and the cylindrical container (cat. 307). Parthian, Sasanian and possibly even Indian influence has also been suggested, particularly for the weaponry, but the presence of inscriptions in South Arabian suggests that the objects were locally produced, probably in the Ḥaḍramawt (Breton 1993, 89–91). Many of the objects are related to banqueting (ladles, bowls, goblets and incense burners) and may reflect a tradition of funerary feasts for the deceased. Banqueting practices may also be suggested in the depictions on funerary stelae which show the deceased on a couch surrounded by attendants and musicians and which date to the same period (Breton 1993, 92; Audouin 1997; 2001). With reference to Mouza on the western coast of Arabia, the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* reads: 'And to the king and the chief are given horses and sumpter-mules, vessels of gold and polished silver, finely woven clothing and copper vessels.' The discoveries at Wādī Ḍura' certainly confirm the existence of such precious objects.



305-7

305 Gilded silver ladle

Wādi Dura', Grave 2
Probably 1st–2nd centuries AD
Silver with gold, H 16.3 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 298

The inscription on the handle reads 'Ilidhara' dhū-Taraf dedicated [this ladle] to the interior of his house Shab'ān'. The bottom of the ladle is decorated with two concentric bands of animal motifs. The outer register contains depictions of two horse riders, two hunters spearing lions and two bulls. In the inner register are two sets of leopards and ibexes confronting each other. This ladle is similar to those found in the western Roman Empire dating to the first–second centuries AD. Ladles have also been found at the Huqqa temple in the Highlands and in the graves at Shuka' and Hajar Talib, and there are also a number of bronze examples of unknown provenance in the Aden Museum (Breton 1993, 92).

306 Silver bowl

Wādi Dura', Grave 2
Possibly 1st–2nd centuries AD
H 12 cm, D 20 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 300

This silver bowl with decorated gold bands and inscribed with a dedication, 'Ilidhara' dhū-Taraf dedicated [this bowl] to his lord Sayīn dhū-Alim with a portion that he collected for him, inside his house Shab'ān'. Underneath the inscription is a register decorated with griffins, dogs, lions, a bull and possibly a wild boar. The Graeco-Roman motifs are not very skilfully executed which suggests, as well as the presence of the South Arabian inscriptions, that this vessel may have been locally produced. According to Robin the inscription was written in the language used in the Ḥaḍramawt, which suggests that the inscription was written prior to the Ḥimyarite conquest of the region at the end of the third century AD (Robin and Bāfaqih 1993, 71, no. 1).

307 Cylindrical silver container

Wādi Dura', Grave 2
2nd–3rd centuries AD
H 7.1 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 297

On the lid of the container is the head of Medusa, underneath which is the name Yafa'. The inscription reads, 'Yafa' dhū-Taraf dedicated [this bowl]'. It is not known where this pyxis was manufactured.

308 Gold finger ring with the monogram of Yafa' dhū-Taraf

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
2nd–4th centuries AD
D 2.1 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/1

309 Silver belt buckle

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
2nd–4th centuries AD
L 9.5 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/5

310 Thirty-nine silver buttons

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
End of the 3rd century AD
D 2.7 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/6

311 Silver belt buckle

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
2nd–4th centuries AD
L 10.3 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/6

312 Iron sword and silver scabbard

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
2nd–4th centuries AD
L 55 cm, W 10 cm, W (blade) 6 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/3

313 Bronze basin

Wādi Dura', Grave 3
End of 3rd century AD
D 36 cm
The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/7

This type of basin, which originally had two handles ending with snakes' heads, was



308-16

very popular in Campania (Pompeii and Herculaneum) towards the middle of the 1st century AD. Although it is possible that this vessel is an import, it is more likely to be a South Arabian imitation of a southern Italian prototype.

314 Bronze lidded incense burner with handle

Wādī Dura', Grave 3

1st–2nd centuries AD

D 10.5 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/8

315 Bronze vessel

Wādī Dura', Grave 3

End of 3rd century AD

H 27.5 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/7

316 Bronze footed incense burner or lamp

Wādī Dura', Grave 3

1st–2nd centuries AD

H 21.7 cm, D 15.4 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 296/22

This was inscribed with the dedication, Abikarib, son of Rabh, dedicated these ten lamps'. Similar objects were found at Hajar adh-Dhaybiyya and at Ḥayd ibn 'Aqil.

317 Millefiori glass bowl

Wādī Dura', Grave 3

End of 3rd century AD

D 21 cm

The 'Ataq Museum, ATM 387

This millefiori glass bowl is considered to be a provincial product belonging to a type common in Syria at the end of the first

century BC from where it may have been imported. Millefiori glass has also been found at Shabwa, Zafār (Breton 1993, 89); and Širwāḥ in Khawlān (National Museum, Ṣana'a, YM 1881: display 2001).



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Notes

CHAPTER 1

- 1 See this volume, Chapter 2.
- 2 For the literary/historical Delilah see, for example, Ackerman 1998; for Esther see Baldwin 1984 and Day 1995; for Cleopatra see Hughes-Hallett 1990 and Walker and Higgs eds 2001. All three women have had a certain appeal to popular culture. Cleopatra in particular. For her role in twentieth-century cinema see Llewellyn-Jones, forthcoming b. Delilah has made appearances on the opera stages of the world and, most famously, in Cecil B. DeMille's 1949 epic *Samson and Delilah*, where she was played by Hedy Lamarr (Ringgold and Boden 1969, 340–49). Esther has had less popular appeal although bizarrely she was played by Joan Collins in the 1960 B-movie, *Esther and the King* (Solomon 2001, 253).
- 3 On the many names of the Queen of Sheba see this volume, Chapter 2.
- 4 Developing this into the genre of popular culture in East Africa or other parts of the world where the Queen of Sheba has a contemporary resonance lies beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 5 For general comments on Orientalism see Said 1978, Lewis 1995, Mackenzie 1995, and Benjamin 1997. For the early archaeology of the Near East see Maisels 1999 and Curtis and Read eds 1995.
- 6 McCall 1998; Larsen 1987.
- 7 Ingles 1997.
- 8 Fergusson 1851; Jones 1856, 28–30.
- 9 Medieval European depictions as early as 1181 depict the queen as dark-skinned (see Warner 1994, fig. 2) but Renaissance painters usually relied on adding a black servant to stress her exotic origin.
- 10 In turn, Flaubert was heavily influenced by Orientalism in art (Tooke 2000).
- 11 The legend of the Queen of Sheba's deformed legs and feet is found in Jewish, Islamic and Christian sources (Watson 1974, 137; Lasser 1993; Clapp 2001, 29–59; Warner 1994 and 1995, 111 ff.; see also this volume, Chapter 2).
- 12 In Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* the Queen of Sheba is the first person to recognise the Tree of Mercy, out of which will be carved the True Cross. For details of the story see Watson 1974, 121 ff.
- 13 Said 1978, 190.
- 14 Watson 1974, 140.
- 15 Lemaître ed. 1958.
- 16 McCall 1998, 206.
- 17 There is one full-length recording of the opera conducted by Adam Fischer: HCD 12179–81.
- 18 Mayer 1994.
- 19 Green 1977.
- 20 Clapp 2001, 65.
- 21 Clapp 2001, 66.
- 22 Cited in Clapp 2001, 67.
- 23 Shaw's screenplay for the British-made 1988 film version of *Yigael* uses much the same dialogue. Higgins (no *Thiaz*): 'Yes, you squashed cabbage leaf, you disgrace to the noble architecture of these columns, you incarnate insult to the English language. I could pass you off as the Queen of Sheba.'
- 24 On the Victorian love of fancy dress see Simon 1995, 82 ff.
- 25 McCall 1998, 206–7.
- 26 Our thanks to Dr Roger Simpson for drawing our attention to this. Again during this period the Queen of Sheba features in a

- series of cigarette cards entitled 'Famous Beauties' and issued by John Player and sons.
- 27 Crutch 1922, 31.
- 28 Thornton 1994, 14; the illustrations for *The Song of Solomon* were reproduced in *American Weekly*, 10 May 1936.
- 29 Russell Flint also produced a series of ten monochrome line drawings to illustrate an edition of *The Song of Songs*. Unbeknown to this artist, a small number of South Arabian funerary stelae (see cat. 143) depict straight-backed chairs that are ultimately derived from the Assyrian type used in his paintings.
- 30 Solomon 2001.
- 31 Elly 1984, 37; the British publicity campaign used the tag line: 'The temptress whose passions shocked the world'.
- 32 Ponzi 1982, 99–100.
- 33 The part was originally played by Tyrone Power, but his untimely death on set (of which an exceptional still photograph survives) forced King Vidor to recast Brynner and re-shoot much of the film. An outline of the events is provided by Masheret (1994), to whom I am grateful for this reference.
- 34 The book of the film by Jay Williams (1959) quickly followed.
- 35 Elly 1984, 41.
- 36 Llewellyn-Jones, forthcoming a.
- 37 The idea is stressed in the press-books: 'Nobody knows what Magda, Queen of Sheba, looked like. But mere eyesight is all that is needed to prove that Gina Lollobrigida is beautiful enough to be convincing as one of the greatest temptresses in history. Indeed Sheba might have done a great deal worse than look like the ravishing Gina.'
- 38 Press-book 1959.
- 39 Mallory 1958, 6.
- 40 A similar story is encountered in a musical version of the queen's story called simply *Sheba*. With book and lyrics by Sharrlen Cooper Cohen and music by Gary William Friedman, *Sheba* opened off Broadway in 1996. It cast an Afro-American actress (Tamara Tunie) in the role of Nicaul, Queen of Sheba, a feisty ruler who holds particularly twentieth-century feminist views which she tries to impart to the patriarchally oppressed women of Israel, thereby raising the wrath of the Hebrew priesthood but the admiration of King Solomon (Joseph Siravo). A CD recording is available: OC-8701.
- 41 The television film is available on DVD.

CHAPTER 2

- 1 Pennacchietti 2000.
- 2 A panel painted by Tintoretto, dated c. 1545, exists in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (Pritchard ed. 1974, fig. 54); a second painting attributed to the same artist hangs in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid. The Knappert oil painting is displayed in the Städe Museum, St. Petersburg.
- 3 The Book of Kings is believed to have been written in its present form during the sixth century BC, and thus four centuries after the period to which it refers (Schippmann 2001, 53). The problem is compounded by the fact that there is considerable controversy over the date of Solomon himself, with one extreme school of thought arguing that he is a wholly fictitious creation of later writers concerned with the early history of Israel.

- However, as with all stories, it most likely contains at least a kernel of truth.
- 4 Other examples are illustrated by Pritchard (ed. 1974, figs 53, 55) and Warner (1995, 109).
- 5 The Islamic and Jewish traditions are analysed in detail by Watt (1974) and Lasser (1993).
- 6 On the subject of the Queen of Sheba in Islamic art, see Louvre 2001.
- 7 A mosaic pavement dated to 1163–5 in the cathedral of Otranto in southern Italy shows the Queen of Sheba with one shoe off and revealing her deformed foot (Warner 1995, fig. 9; see also Nestle 1904).
- 8 A sixteenth-century German booklet prophesying the end of the world cited as its author 'the thirteenth Sibyl' / A Queen of Sheba who long ago gave [us] future events to be recognised' (Warner 1995, 98).

CHAPTER 3

- 1 Beeston 1989b; Briand 1996.
- 2 There has been considerable discussion in earlier literature over the absolute chronology of southern Arabia, specifically over the merits of so-called 'long' (accepted by most scholars today) and 'short' chronologies (the latter championed by the late J. Pirenne); see Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 228–9, 240; Schippmann 2001, 35–48.
- 3 Strabo, *Geography*, XVI, 4, 24. This event is attributed to 25/24 BC by some other modern authors; see Young 2001, 100–3, for a critical view of the motives behind the expedition.
- 4 *Periplus* (Casson 1989, 27–8); Sedov 1997b; Young 2001.
- 5 Arnaud 1845; Pirenne 1958, 275–90.
- 6 Goitein ed. 1941; Halévy 1872, 1873, 1877.
- 7 Glaser 1913; Dostal 1990, 1993.
- 8 Rathjens and von Wissmann 1932.
- 9 Caton-Thompson 1944.
- 10 Phillips 1955.
- 11 The history of research and fieldwork in this region is also summarised by de Maigret (2002) and Schippmann (2001), and many of the latest results are discussed in essays published in the catalogues edited by Robin and Vogt (1997) and Seipel (1998).
- 12 Müller 1991a; see this volume, Chapters 5 and 9, for comparative city sizes. Although Beeston (1974) argued that there were no true cities in southern Arabia, the presence of major monumental buildings and their relative size compared to rural settlements suggests otherwise.
- 13 al-Hamdani 1938; see Piotrovsky 1988.
- 14 Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet and Robin 1999/2000.
- 15 Sukhu; see Liverani 1992.
- 16 Galter 1993.
- 17 RES 3945–6.
- 18 Cavigny 1997 (shortened version; for a lengthier version, see Seipel ed. 1998); Calver and Robin *et al.* 1997, 42–7.
- 19 Briand 1996; see also this volume, Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 4

- 1 See this volume, Chapter 5.
- 2 The following essay is substantially the same as Chapter 2 in Howland 2001.
- 3 For instance, Pirenne 1956.
- 4 This is the most commonly used spelling of this god's name which is also spelt 'Imluqih in older literature.

- 5 RES 3945, CIS 4.363.
- 6 CIS 4.377.
- 7 RES 3945.
- 8 CIS 4.967.
- 9 M 203.
- 10 See this volume, Chapter 2.
- 11 Pritchard ed. 1974.
- 12 Sukhu 346/351.
- 13 AR 2.18, 440.
- 14 RES 3945–6.
- 15 Cited by Strabo 16.4.2.
- 16 *Zenon papyri* 59536.
- 17 Pliny 12.54.
- 18 M 247.
- 19 M 392–8.
- 20 M 338.
- 21 M 349; Seipel ed. 1998, 293, 295, no. 164.
- 22 Opinions differ as to the dates of this kingdom and it may have begun in the mid-fourth century BC (see Schippmann 2001, 48–9).
- 23 RES 3858.
- 24 Cited by Strabo 16.4.2.
- 25 Rougé 1988, 68–9.
- 26 Strabo 2.5.12. The location of Myos Hormos has now been identified with the site of Quseir al-Qadim which was first excavated by J. Johnson and D.S. Whitcomb, and most recently by D.P.S. Peacock (Peacock 1993; Blue 2002).
- 27 *Periplus*, chs 27–8.
- 28 Strabo 16.4.22.
- 29 Pliny 6.161–2.
- 30 Pliny 6.161.
- 31 *Periplus*, chs 23–4.
- 32 'Abdullah 1979.
- 33 Ja 1028, Ry 507; quoted in translation by Howland 2001, 52–3.
- 34 Philostorgius 3.4.
- 35 Ja 1028, Ry 507–8; quoted in translation by Howland 2001, 52–3; for a full discussion see Beaucamp, Briquel-Chatonnet and Robin 1999/2000.
- 36 Procopius 1.20.
- 37 CIS 4.541.
- 38 Müller 1991b.
- 39 Ibn Hisham 41–3.

CHAPTER 5

- 1 See Edens and Wilkinson 1998 and de Maigret 1984, 2002 for a summary of Yemeni prehistory and further references.
- 2 de Maigret 1990.
- 3 Edens, Wilkinson and Barratt 2000.
- 4 Cleuziou, Inizan and Marcolongo 1992; see Breton 2000 for additional discussion of architecture and reference to a radiocarbon date.
- 5 Badre 1991.
- 6 See this volume, Chapter 7.
- 7 Vogt 1997a, 1997b; Vogt and Sedov 1997, 1998.
- 8 Benardelli and Parrinello 1970.
- 9 Kaul 1998; Guimil-Mair *et al.* 1999.
- 10 McCorrison 2000.
- 11 Cleuziou, Inizan and Marcolongo 1992; de Maigret 1996; Baermer *et al.* 2001.
- 12 Baermer *et al.* in press.
- 13 Newton and Zarins 2000.
- 14 de Maigret 1996.
- 15 Parallels may be drawn here with the early development of urban culture within the floodplains of the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates rivers.
- 16 Josi 1986; Zarins 1997.

CHAPTER 6

- 1 Herodotus 3.106–13.
- 2 Herodotus 3.97; repeated by Pliny 12.40.
- 3 Crone 1987, 16.
- 4 Quoted by Müller 1978, col. 708, lines 40–58, or see Crone 1987, 17.
- 5 Seipel ed. 1998, 56; on the identification of Punt see for instance Bradbury 1996.
- 6 The history of the Arabian aromatics trade is discussed at greater length by Müller (1978) and Groom (1981; 1995; 1997); a collection of papers on the same subject has been edited by Avanzini (1997).
- 7 Groom 1981, 38–45.
- 8 See this volume, Chapter 4; the second of these references is no earlier than 689 BC.
- 9 Haran 1960; see also Crone 1987, 15.
- 10 Theophrastus 9.4.
- 11 Pliny 12.30.
- 12 Beeston 1959.
- 13 Pliny 12.32.
- 14 Strabo 16.4.19.
- 15 Sayed 1984; Beeston 1984; Seipel ed. 1998, 293, 295, no. 164.
- 16 Pliny 12.51–70.
- 17 Pliny 12.51–70.
- 18 *Periplus*, chs 6, 17.
- 19 *Periplus*, ch. 24.
- 20 *Periplus*, ch. 23.
- 21 *Periplus*, ch. 24.
- 22 *Periplus*, ch. 24.
- 23 *Periplus*, ch. 28.
- 24 *Periplus*, ch. 31.
- 25 *Periplus*, ch. 32.
- 26 Pliny 12.32.
- 27 Thulin and Claesson 1991.
- 28 See cat. 101. A similar incense burner in the Musée du Louvre is inscribed with the terms *hadhah*, *ladanum*, *nand* and *daric* (Calvet and Robin eds 1997, 104, no. 4).
- 29 Herodotus 3, 115.
- 30 Dioscorides 1.24/33; Pliny 12.98.
- 31 Diodorus Siculus 2.49.3; Dioscorides 1, 24/33.
- 32 Pliny 12.42; see also Crone 1987, 253–63.
- 33 Pliny 12.55.

CHAPTER 7

- 1 Cited in Varisco 1983, 158.
- 2 Wilkinson 1997; Lézine *et al.* 1998.
- 3 Steffen 1979.
- 4 de Maigret 1990; Ghalib 1991; Edens and Wilkinson 1998.
- 5 de Maigret 1998.
- 6 Varisco 1996.
- 7 Wilkinson 1999, 186.
- 8 Barceló, Kirchner and Torró 2000.
- 9 Serjant 1974, 35.
- 10 Varisco 1991.
- 11 Caton-Thompson and Gardner 1939; Bowen 1958a, 1958b; Hehmyer 1989; Hehmyer and Schmidt 1991; Brunner 1997; Marcolongo and Morandi Bonacossi 1997; Gentelle 1998.
- 12 Brunner and Haefner 1986, 81.
- 13 Brunner 1997.
- 14 Bowen 1958a; 1958b.
- 15 Brunner 1997.
- 16 Hehmyer 1989; Hehmyer and Schmidt 1991.
- 17 Calvet and Robin *et al.* 1997, 110–11, no. 21.
- 18 Brunner 1997.
- 19 Serjant 1988.
- 20 Hehmyer 1995.
- 21 Costantini 1990.
- 22 Stewart 1987; Breton 1999, 101.
- 23 British Admiralty 1946, c93.
- 24 Breton 1999, 101.
- 25 Varisco 1994.
- 26 Gibson and Wilkinson 1995.

CHAPTER 8

- 1 Geukens 1966; Greenwood and Blackley 1967; Bevilacqua, as Sartori and Barabà 1996.

2 Vogt 1998, 88–9.

- 3 See Glanzman 1999, 82.
- 4 For example, Dostal 1987; Glanzman 1987a, 135.
- 5 Basalama 1998.
- 6 For instance, Dostal 1987; Champault 1997.
- 7 Sedov 1992, 116, fig. 5; Schmidt 1997/8, fig. 9.
- 8 Bessac 2001.
- 9 Bessac 1998.
- 10 Brunner 1989, 30–33; Müller 1991a, map between pp. 560–61; Vogt 1998.
- 11 Grohmann 1963, 209–18; Doe 1983, 216–19.
- 12 Doe 1983, 215–19.
- 13 Doe 1983, 219–24.
- 14 Costa 1992a.
- 15 Seipel ed. 1998, no. 169.
- 16 Seipel ed. 1998, no. 296.
- 17 *Periplus* (Casson 1989).
- 18 For example, Albright 1958a, pls 174, 175, 177; Jamme 1962, 255–6.
- 19 For example, Jamme 1962, 185, pl. 24; Ja 689.
- 20 Seipel ed. 1998, no. 169.
- 21 Jamme 1962, pls A, B, C; fig. 2.
- 22 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 231, 237.
- 23 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 230, 234.
- 24 Breton 2001, 56.
- 25 Doe 1983, 215.
- 26 Seipel ed. 1998, no. 235.
- 27 Albright 1958a, 223, pls 165, 166, 181.
- 28 For example, Pirenne 1965b.
- 29 Darles 1991, 100; Seigne 1991; Breton 1998, 140–41.
- 30 Seipel ed. 1998, no. 258.
- 31 See Breton 1999, 53–73.
- 32 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 224–5.
- 33 de Maigret and Robin 1993, pls 14, 16; Daum 1999.
- 34 Glanzman 1998, fig. 8.
- 35 Higen 1998, 122–3, n. 9, 10; Vogt, Gerlach and Higen 1998/99, 143; Gerlach 2001.
- 36 Pirenne 1960.
- 37 Cleveland 1965, 21–7.
- 38 Pirenne 1960, 1962, 1965a; Audouin 1991, 178–81, figs 7–9.
- 39 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 272–3, 400.
- 40 Vogt, de Maigret and Roux 1998, 186–91.
- 41 Cleveland 1965, 16–20.
- 42 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 285–8.
- 43 Cleveland 1965, 11–15.
- 44 Seipel ed. 1998, nos 395–9, 403–5.
- 45 Pirenne 1961.
- 46 Glanzman 1999, 83.
- 47 Fleming and Pigott 1987; Glanzman 1987c.
- 48 Lehr 1999; Müller 2000.
- 49 Jamme 1952, 212–13.
- 50 Ryckmans 1978, 54.
- 51 Albright 1958a, pl. 179; Glanzman 1998, figs 7, 9, 10.
- 52 Sedov and Davidde 1998.
- 53 For example, Grohmann 1963, 236, pl. XXI.2.
- 54 Sepall 1958.
- 55 Wedemann 1983; Avanzini 1996.
- 56 Mattusch 1988, 15–22.
- 57 *Periplus* (Casson 1989, 21, 41, 67, 154).
- 58 Breton 1999, 174–5.
- 59 Glanzman 1999, 83.
- 60 Albright 1958a, 226, pl. 172; Jamme 1962, 245, pl. 51; Ja 832; Seipel ed. 1998, no. 254.
- 61 For example, Bordreuil and Bracquellat 1998, 122.
- 62 Costa 1992b; Pickworth 1998, 203.
- 63 Peacock and Williams 1986, 11–12, fig. 4.
- 64 Maraziti 1993; 2000; *Periplus* (Casson 1989, 65, 81, 154, 207).

- 65 Overstreet *et al.* 1988, 395–6; Glanzman 1987d; Posey 1994, 38–9; Blakely and Glanzman 1996.
- 66 Glanzman 1987a; 1987b, 191–2, 197; 1994, 439, 484; Posey 1994.
- 67 de Maigret 1990.
- 68 Sedov 1997a, 46, figs 38–40.
- 69 See van Beek 1969, 83–100.
- 70 Peacock and Williams 1986, fig. 4; compare Costa 1992b; Pickworth 1998b, 203.
- 71 Porter 2001.

CHAPTER 9

- 1 Breton 1999, 75–91; see also Schippmann 2001, 96–110.
- 2 Bessac 1998.
- 3 Stronach 1967.
- 4 Bouchariat and Labrousse 1979.
- 5 Madhloom and Mahdi 1976.
- 6 Breton *et al.* 1997.
- 7 Bessac 1998.
- 8 Bessac 1998; Breton and Bessac 2002.
- 9 Frantzouff 2001b; texts Rb XIV/90, 60, Rb 1/89, 279.
- 11 Sedov and Baray 1994.
- 12 Caton-Thompson 1944.
- 13 Breton *et al.* 1998.
- 14 Hamilton 1942; see Darles 1998.
- 15 Griaizevitch 1974; text Griaizevitch 27.
- 16 Pirenne 1990, 72; text Shabwa S/77/Mahdi.
- 17 Jamme 1958, 186–7; text Ja 118.
- 18 Müller 1972; text DJE 12.
- 19 Bron 1998; text Ja 644 describes how rebels became trapped in the Royal Palace in Mari.
- 20 Compare this with the figure of 400–500 estimated for the Bronze Age town at Hammam al-Qa (this volume, Chapter 4); see also Breton in press.
- 21 Seigne 1991.
- 22 Al-Iryani 1973; text Ir 13.
- 23 Seigne 1991.
- 24 Strabo 16.20.
- 25 Boak 1935.
- 26 For example, Walker and Higgs eds 2001, 332–4.
- 27 Anfray 1997; Krencker 1913.
- 28 Edens, Wilkinson and Barratt 2000.
- 29 Breton 1991.
- 30 Breton *et al.* 1998.
- 31 Bessac 1998.
- 32 Breton, McMahon and Warburton 1998.
- 33 Breton 1994a.
- 34 Rathjens and von Wissmann 1932.
- 35 Caton-Thompson 1944.
- 36 Albright 1958a.
- 37 Schmidt 1997/98.
- 38 Schmidt 1982.
- 39 Breton 1992.
- 40 Breton 1998c.
- 41 RES 3945, lines 14–16.
- 42 de Maigret and Robin 1993.
- 43 Frantzouff 2001a.
- 44 Frantzouff 2001b; text Rb 1: 83.
- 45 Breton 1979.
- 46 Serjant 1954.
- 47 According to Pirenne 1990.
- 48 Breton and Darles 1998.
- 49 *Periplus* (Casson 1989).
- 50 Kitchen in press; Baratte in press.

CHAPTER 10

- 1 See also Schippmann 2001, 19–22.
- 2 For instance, Beeston 1987; other scholars have defined these dialects as distinct languages.
- 3 Bron 1991, 1994.
- 4 Ryckmans 1953.
- 5 Robin 1992.
- 6 Seipel ed. 1998, 293, 295, no. 164.
- 7 Albright 1982.
- 8 Abdullah 1988.

- 9 Ryckmans, Müller and Abdullah 1994; Frantzouff 1999.
- 10 Wellstedt 1839.
- 11 Gresenius 1841; Röddiger 1841.
- 12 Honeyman 1952.
- 13 Robin and Bron 1974; Beeston 1979; Irvine and Beeston 1988.
- 14 Ryckmans 1985; Sima 1999.
- 15 Lundin 1987.
- 16 Bordreuil and Pardee 1995.
- 17 Ryckmans 1984.
- 18 Beeston 1989a.
- 19 Frantzouff 1999.
- 20 Ryckmans 2001.

CHAPTER 11

- 1 al-Hamdani 1938.
- 2 Recent overviews of the subject of this essay include Breton (1999, 117–42).
- 3 GL 1720.
- 4 RES 2693.
- 5 RES 4176.
- 6 A synagogue has been identified at Qāni.

CHAPTER 12

- 1 Vogt, de Maigret and Roux 1999; Breton 1999, 143–57.
- 2 Higen 1999.
- 3 de Maigret 1996; see also this volume, Chapter 3.
- 4 Roux 1992.
- 5 Caton-Thompson 1944.
- 6 Sedov and Griaizevitch eds 1996, 117–43.
- 7 Basalama 1998; Breton 1999, 145.
- 8 Cleveland 1965, 173–5, plans I–II, pls 108–20; Phillips 1955, pl. opposite p. 117.
- 9 Higen 1998; Gerlach and Higen 2000; Gerlach 2001.
- 10 Illustrated by Vogt, de Maigret and Roux 1998, 238.
- 11 Sedov 2001, 34.
- 12 Breton and Bafaqih 1993.
- 13 Vogt and Gerlach in press.
- 14 Caton-Thompson 1944; Cleveland 1965.
- 15 Breton and Bafaqih 1993.
- 16 Vogt and Gerlach in press.
- 17 Seipel ed. 1998, 335–6, nos 285–6.
- 18 Robin and Vogt eds 1997, 214.
- 19 Seipel ed. 1998, 335–6, nos 279–82.
- 20 See cat. 114 for references; see also Breton 1999, 154–5.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- 'Abadan Robin and Gajda 1994.
Ir Iryani 1973.
AR Luckenbill 1927.
CIH *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum IV. Inscriptions Himyariticae et Sabaeae cuneiformes*, Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1889–1930.
CIS *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, I–III, Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1881.
DJE *Deutschen Jemen-Expedition. Neue Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* 1, 1972.
Ja 1028 Jamme 1966.
M *Iscrizioni sudaniche*, vol. 1: *iscrizioni minee*, Naples: Istituto Orientale, 1974.
Rb Inscriptions from Rayban, see Lundin, A.G., 'Die Inschriften des amiken Raybân', Lundin, A.G., 'Eine Grabinschrift aus der Nekropole Raybân XVI, *Mare Erythraeum* 1, 1997.
RES *Repertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*, 8 vols, Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1900–1968.
Ry G. Ryckmans, *Le Muséon* 1927 to 1965.
Sukhu Cavigneux and Ismail 1990.

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Concordance

ABBREVIATIONS

AFSM	The American Foundation for the Study of Man, Washington
AMO	The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
Barber	Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham
BM	The British Museum, London
ANE	Department of the Ancient Near East, The British Museum
CM	Department of Coins and Medals, The British Museum
MME	Department of Medieval and Modern Europe, The British Museum
OA	Department of Oriental Antiquities, The British Museum

PD	Department of Prints and Drawings, The British Museum
CUMAA	The Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge
Fitz	The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
GOAMM	The General Organisation for Antiquities, Museums and Manuscripts, Yemen
ATM	The Ataq Museum, Yemen
BaM	The Bayhan Museum, Yemen
HM	The Hawra Museum, Yemen
IM	The Ibb Museum, Yemen
MaM	The Marib Museum, Sana'a', Yemen
MiM	The Military Museum, Sana'a', Yemen

MuM	The Mukalla Museum, Yemen
NAM	The National Museum, Aden, Yemen
SM	The Say'un Museum, Yemen
YM	The National Museum, Sana'a', Yemen
ZM	The Zafar Museum, Yemen
NG	The National Gallery, London
RSA	The Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh
V&A	The Victoria and Albert Museum, London

NOTE: all figures in the concordance refer to page numbers;
where catalogue numbers are also given, they are preceded by cat.

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1	Private collection, UK						
2	Private collection, UK						
3	AMO 1971.26						
4	BM PD 1931-6-13.14						
5	BM PD 1919-12-16.35						
6	AMO 1955.58						
7	RSA 2000.62						
8	V&A LAF 1597 (A)						
9	BM ANE Ephemeris 127						
10	Private collection, Brazil						
11	BM OA 1948-12-11.8						
12	Private collection, UK						
13	NG 3107						
14	BM PD 1869-4-10.132						
15	BM PD 1854-2-11.82						
16	BM PD 1875-7-10.598						
17	BM PD 1845-8-25.477						
18	BM PD 1874-8-8.227						
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20	V&A A.32.1959						
21	V&A 2034.1855						
22	AMO 1994.142						
23	BM MME 1958-12-1.382 = CAL 382						
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31	BM ANE 1862-10-28.9 = E48461	185, 234	cat. 425; 373-4		cat. 398; 389, 391	79	
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36	GOAMM NAM 612	201, 235	cat. 448; 383	cat. 60M; 299	cat. 420; 397-8	61	79
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40	YM 3	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
41	YM 4	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
42	YM 6	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
43	YM 8	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
44	YM 38	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
45	YM 45	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
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47	YM 64	119, 232	cat. 191; 304, 306		cat. 187; 328-9	89	77
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70	BM CM BMC Sabazani III, p. 64, no. 7						
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78	BM CM 1936-12-21.12						
79	BM CM 1936-12-21.7						
80	BM CM 1951-2-1.6						
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89	GOAMM YM 12964	34, 230	cat. 70: 138, 140		cat. 67: 293-4	69	85
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91	GOAMM MaM 249	33, 230	cat. 66: 138-9	cat. 15M: 278	cat. 63: 291-2, 294		100
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101	BM ANE 1915-7-10.5 + 113230	75, 231	cat. 34: 90, 92		cat. 32: 280-81		
102	CUMAA 51.578						
103	AFSM 12.2011		cat. 362: 357-8	cat. 205M: 294	cat. 340: 374-5		
104	BM ANE 1960-12-12.1 + 132909	75, 231	cat. 31: 90-91		cat. 31: 280-81	82	
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110	BM ANE 1937-5-7.1 + 125682	70, 231	cat. 20: 86, 88		cat. 20: 276, 278		
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112	BM ANE 1907-10-12.5 + 102480						
113	BM ANE 1992-6-23.3						
114	GOAMM MaM AW 98 A 2165		cat. 338: 349-50	fig. 11: 118	cat. 316: 367, 369	84	91
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116	GOAMM ATM 386	193, 235	cat. 441: 381		cat. 413: 394, 396		
117	GOAMM ATM 382, 384, 385		cat. 443: 381		cat. 415: 394, 396-7		
118	GOAMM MaM 106	209, 235	cat. 307: 341-2		cat. 285: 359, 361		
119	GOAMM BaM 672	182, 235	cat. 421: 371-2		cat. 394: 387-8		
120	GOAMM MaM BAR 8	53, 231	cat. 35: 90, 92	cat. 5M: 280	cat. 33: 280-81		
121	BM ANE 1966-12-13.1 + 134886						
122	GOAMM YM 601	199, 235	cat. 445: 381-2		cat. 417: 396-7		
123	BM ANE 1930-6-13.25 + 122029, 1930-6-13.24 + 122028, 1930-6-13.23 + 122027						
124	GOAMM YM 69	206, 235	cat. 292: 336, 339	cat. 42M: 301	cat. 271: 365, 357	63	X
125	BM ANE 1971-7-2.1 - 135585						
126	BM ANE 1965-10-11.2 - 146094						
127	BM ANE 1965-10-11.1 - 146093	160, 233	cat. 403: 366-7	cat. 45M: 298	cat. 380: 382, 384	50	X
128	BM ANE 1985-2-23.13 - 141544						
129	GOAMM Mb 289						
130	GOAMM NAM 616	168, 233	cat. 276: 335	cat. 41M: 299	cat. 256: 350, 352, 354	106	73
131	BM ANE 1977-2-26.19 - 136817, 1977-2-26.20 - 136818, 1977-2-26.21 - 136819, 1977-2-26.23 - 136821					72	94
132	BM ANE 1977-2-26.18 - 136816						
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134	BM ANE 1977-2-26.26 - 136874						
135	BM ANE 1977-2-26.15 - 136813						
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137	BM ANE 1977-2-26.2 - 136800						
138	BM ANE 1960-12-17.5 - 137013						
139	BM ANE 1930-6-13.19 - 137074						
140	BM ANE 1863-1-3.2 - 145783						
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142	BM ANE 2007-1-14.1						
143	BM ANE 1930-6-13.16 - 125070						
144	Inv. I 10.19.79						
145	GOAMM YM 1826					107	75
146	GOAMM YM 1677					107	74
147	BM ANE 1972-2-27.1 - 145511						

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149	GOAMM YM 210	203, 235	cat. 455; 385-6	cat. 71M, 72M; 314 (restored copy)	cat. 427; 400-1	44	70
150	GOAMM YM 217	203, 235	cat. 455; 385-6	cat. 71M, 72M; 314 (restored copy)	cat. 427; 400-1	44	70
151	BM ANE 1937-6-16.1 = 127409 = L26						
152	AFSM TS 152A	202, 235	cat. 451; 384-5	cat. 208; 293	cat. 423; 399-400	45	63
153	GOAMM AFSM TS 152B	129, 233	cat. 218; 312, 315		cat. 206; 334, 337	80	75
155	GOAMM YM 2480					107	75
156	AFSM TTT 790	110, 232	cat. 173; 297, 299		cat. 169; 322	75	68
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158	GOAMM NAM 56	204, 235	cat. 458; 387	cat. 63M; 292	cat. 428; 400, 403		
159	GOAMM ATM 218	203, 235	cat. 188; 304-5		cat. 184; 327-8	76	68
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163	GOAMM IM 28		cat. 462; 388, 390	cat. 77M; 312	cat. 432; 402, 404		
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166	GOAMM YM 282	196, 235	cat. 439; 380		cat. 411; 394-5	74	67
167	BM ANE 1984-3-31.1 = 139621						
168	BM ANE 1907-10-12.2 = 102477		cat. 460; 387-8		cat. 430; 402-3	75	
169	BM ANE 1907-10-12.3 = 102478						
170	GOAMM MiM 101		cat. 308-12; 341, 343		cat. 286-90; 360-62	87	89
171	GOAMM MiM 102		cat. 308-12; 341, 343		cat. 286-90; 360-62	87	89
172	GOAMM MiM 103		cat. 308-12; 341, 343		cat. 286-90; 360-62	87	89
173	GOAMM MiM 104		cat. 308-12; 341, 343		cat. 286-90; 360-62	87	89
174	GOAMM MiM 105		cat. 308-12; 341, 343		cat. 286-90; 360-62	87	89
175	BM ANE 1934-5-10.1 = 125338						
176	AFSM TC HI 11	176, 234	cat. 359; 357-8		cat. 337; 374-5		
177	BM ANE 1977-2-26.1 = 136799						
178	BM ANE 1972-2-26.1 = 135682						
179	GOAMM MaM BAR 732	142, 233	cat. 248; 326		cat. 230-35; 345-6		
180	AFSM H 2128	51, 230	cat. 131; 284-5		cat. 128; 304, 307		
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189	GOAMM YM 10240	108, 232	cat. 226; 318	cat. 33M; 286	cat. 211; 338	100	104
190	GOAMM MaM BAR 205		cat. 236; 322-3		cat. 219; 341-2		
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193	AMO 1952.520						
194	GOAMM NAM 1218	114, 232	cat. 186; 303-4	cat. 70M; 303	cat. 182; 326, 328	103	64
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FRONT COVER: Calcite-alabaster
stela; possibly from Tamna',
1st century BC.

BACK COVER: Calcite-alabaster
incense burner showing a camel
rider; Shabwa, c. 3rd century AD.

With 260 colour
and 50 black-and-white illustrations.

The Queen of Sheba is a famous legendary figure, first referred to in the Old Testament as bringing great riches to the court of Solomon. Later Jewish, Islamic, Ethiopian and Christian traditions dwell on different attributes, giving rise to a rich artistic vein, particularly but not exclusively in Renaissance and later art. The truth is that the Queen of Sheba remains an anonymous figure of legend associated with the land of Saba', one of the great early kingdoms of southern Arabia (present-day Yemen). The ancient caravan kingdoms of this region have fascinated travellers and scholars since the nineteenth century but our understanding of the history and culture of this region has been fundamentally revised as a result of new archaeological discoveries made in recent decades.

This exhibition catalogue charts the story from the Queen of Sheba in art and legend to the archaeological evidence for the historic kingdoms that gave rise to the legend. It contains twelve essays by leading scholars from Britain, USA, Canada and Europe. Over 300 items are described and illustrated in colour, ranging from little-known artworks in UK collections to antiquities from Yemen, mostly never previously exhibited in Britain and providing a magnificent record of the riches of southern Arabia.

St John Simpson is an Assistant Keeper in The British Museum and is responsible for the ancient Arabia, Iran and 'Alexander to Islam' period collections in the Department of the Ancient Near East. He has worked on archaeological projects throughout the Near East, including Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates, and has co-directed excavations at Merv in Turkmenistan.

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